22 December 2022

The Romans are coming!

University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) are undertaking the archaeological excavation for Leicester Cathedral Revealed. Today is ULAS’s last day in 2022 digging at the Cathedral, and they be back in the New Year to wrap up the excavation by mid-February if all goes to plan. Whilst the team shuts down the site for the Christmas break, excavation director Mathew Morris reveals some of the latest discoveries from the site.

In most of the excavation area, we are now below the burial soil and excavating features which pre-date the church. We are still finding burials which are in graves which have been dug deep into the underlying archaeology. These are potentially very significant in telling the story of St Martin’s foundation as a church but we will focus on these in a later blog. We have also started excavating the Roman archaeology and I thought that for this final blog before Christmas I would move away from death and burial and showcase some of the Roman artefacts we have found so far.

**Photograph 1:** An archaeologist uncovers the remains of a Roman backyard. The compact pebble surface was laid down using local sand and gravel. Image: ULAS

**Photograph 2:** An archaeologist excavates a vertical section through the Roman archaeology. The Roman layers, representing the town’s history from the 1st century to the 4th century AD are about 1m thick and comprise alternating layers of yard surface (visible as bands of pebbles) and cultivation soils. The pale grey sand at the bottom of the section to the left of the archaeologist is the natural ground level before the Roman’s arrived in Leicester. Today, this is over 3m below modern ground level. Image: ULAS

For the most part, the Roman archaeology in this part of Leicester appears to represent outdoor activity, mostly garden soils and gravelled yard surfaces. The soils are producing large quantities of domestic waste, including broken pottery, animal bone, oyster shells and a range of more unique artefacts. The pottery and animal bone were probably introduced to the soil with more organic compost from a nearby midden (refuse heap) whilst some of the other artefacts, including coins and jewellery, may have been lost by people using the open space. This is consistent with this area being part of the backgarden of a townhouse which would have fronted onto a
street either to the north of the dig site (where we know there was a Roman building beneath the Cathedral) or to the east.


gallery of finds:

Photograph 3: A tray of Roman pottery from the Leicester Cathedral Revealed excavation. The tray contains a range of tableware and kitchenware, including samian ware bowls, greyware storage jars, white ware jugs, mortaria and amphorae. Image: ULAS

Photograph 4: Samian ware (also known as terra sigillata) was a glossy red tableware made on an industrial scale in Gaul (France and the Rhineland) during the Roman Empire. Some vessels had relief decoration, such as this sherd from Leicester Cathedral. The figure on the left appears to be a murmillo-type gladiator with his characteristic helmet, shield and sword. The head of an opponent gladiator survives to the right and the writing between them is probably a name. Image: ULAS

Photograph 5: A very worn late 1st-century Roman coin. The bust is an emperor from the House of Flavian (AD 69-96), possibly Vespasian or his son Titus. Image: ULAS

Photograph 6: Four late Roman coins. Clockwise from top left: Constans I (AD 347-48); a barbarous imitation of a late Roman coin (mid-4th century AD); Tetricus II (Gallic Empire, AD 273-74) – the die has miss-struck the blank when the coin was struck; and Constantius II as Caesar under Constantine I (AD c.320s/330s). Image: ULAS

Photograph 7: A copper alloy head stud brooch dating to the late 1st or 2nd century AD. It is intact except for the pin which has broken off. Beneath the mud, enamel decoration is faintly visible. Brooches were common dress accessories for men and women in the early Roman period and were used to fasten a cloak at the right shoulder. Image: ULAS

Photograph 8: Two Roman hairpins. On the left, a pin with a spherical head carved from animal bone, and on the right a copper alloy pin with a grooved head (probably broken). Both are broken mid-shaft, with their tips missing. Hairpins were a new introduction to Britain in the Roman period and show that hairstyles amongst ordinary people in Leicester changed as the town Romanised. As today, hairstyles often followed celebrity trends, most notably that of the empress of the day, or other members of the imperial family. Images: ULAS

Photograph 9: The bowl of a copper alloy spoon known as a cochleare. The small, round, shallow bowl would have attached to a long handle which tapered to a point. It is thought that this type of spoon was used to eat snails and eggs, as described by Martial in one of his epigrams – ‘Coclearia - sum coeleis habilis sed nec minus utilis ovis.’ [Snail spoon - I am convenient for snails, but no less useful for eggs]. Image: ULAS
Sadly, Christmas also marks the end of our Wednesday afternoon public tours at the Cathedral. It has been fantastic to be able to open the site up to so many people from the local community and to share what we have been finding live but we now need to knuckle down and finish the excavation. This isn’t the end of our outreach, however, and you can keep following the archaeological project here via our blogs (find them all here), on our social media pages and the Leicester Cathedral Revealed Project Director Updates page including the timelapse video, which updates monthly.

Mathew Morris MA ACIfA  
Project Officer  
Archaeological Services (ULAS)  
University of Leicester

14 December 2022  
**Angels revealed!**

The high-level scaffolding inside the Cathedral is providing close-up views of the impressive medieval hammerbeam roof that has been restored several times over the centuries, and our wonderful carved and gilded angels - each carrying a shield depicting an aspect of the crucifixion of Jesus.

The symbols on this [shield of a tunic and dice](#) reference the Gospel accounts of the Roman soldiers dividing Jesus’ clothes among them by gambling.

While on this [shield](#) the symbols appear to be a spear and a sponge on a stick, referencing the Gospel accounts of a sponge on a stick being soaked in cheap wine and offered to Jesus to drink, and one of the soldiers piercing Jesus' side with a spear.

Simon Bentley  
Project Director for Leicester Cathedral Revealed  
simon.bentley@leicestercofe.org

5 December 2022  
**Updated time lapse video showing progress during November**

Updated video from the time lapse camera outside the Cathedral shows the ongoing archaeological excavations being undertaken by the University of Leicester
Archaeological Services (ULAS) to enable the construction of the basement for the new visitor and learning centre extension.

Archaeologists have now carefully unearthed more than 850 complete burials, an incredible density given that they are only investigating a 195 sq m area (measuring 13 x 15m or 8% of the total graveyard).

The video shows a new metal access ramp put in place to allow excavation of burials in the original earth access ramp. If you look carefully, at the far end of the new access ramp you can see the excavation of a lead coffin containing the mortal remains of Edward Entwhistle Wilkinson (d.1846), who was a surgeon at the Leicester Infirmary – the photograph shows the coffin more clearly. Mathew Morris from ULAS will be telling us more about Edward Entwhistle Wilkinson in a future blog.

The video can be seen below:

Inside the Cathedral the internal time lapse camera has been relocated to the top of the scaffolding at the west end of the nave and the short video shows the Cathedral’s wonderful gilded angels, as well as paint testing ahead of the full redecoration work, and high level electrical re-wiring.

The video can be seen below:

Simon Bentley
Project Director for Leicester Cathedral Revealed
simon.bentley@leicestercofe.org

21 November 2022
Archaeology – The story so far

University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) are undertaking the archaeological excavation for Leicester Cathedral Revealed. In his latest blog, archaeology site director Mathew Morris updates us on the archaeological work carried out to date.

The ULAS team have now been on site at Leicester Cathedral for over a year. This has included nine months of excavation within the footprint of the new visitor and learning centre as well as monitoring of other groundwork both inside and outside the Cathedral. Archaeological work is due to continue for another couple of months as the team wraps up the excavation of the burial ground and transitions to investigating what lies beneath.

At the time of writing, we have excavated 850 burials from the basement area of the new visitor and learning centre, an incredible density given that we are only investigating a 195 sq m area (measuring 13 x 15m or 8% of the total graveyard). We still have burials in our
original access ramp, which we are now excavating, and we expect the final count to be over 900.

**Photographs 1a and 1b. Then and now:**
The excavation in June (left) and November (right) 2022. Images: Messenger.
Watch the latest time-lapse video here [https://vimeo.com/764227055/7b61a59d64](https://vimeo.com/764227055/7b61a59d64)

I’ve written previously about our 18th and 19th century burials and how they are providing a fascinating insight into the development of the funeral trade in Leicester ([you can read my previous blogs here](#)). We now have eleven named individuals, and their stories really bring this period of Leicester’s history to life. All have connections with the Parish Church of St Martin (now the Cathedral). Many were born in the parish, were baptised in the church, married in the church, and lived and worked in the streets around it. Some never left the parish; others, in later life, moved away to more affluent suburbs around Leicester but still chose to retain a link with their church in death. Three have memorial plaques inside the Cathedral and we have also found surviving gravestones for three re-erected in Welford Road Cemetery and Saffron Hill Cemetery. I’ve already written about John Ottey and Anne Barratt, and I will tell the stories of our other named individuals in future blogs – they include a mayor of Leicester and a surgeon at the Leicester Infirmary.

**Photograph 2. Archaeologists excavate a brick-lined burial vault. The brass nameplate read ‘John Slater, died 29th March 1837, aged 77 years’. Image: ULAS.**

We are now excavating the earliest graves in the burial sequence. These appear to date to the 12th century. At present we have no clear evidence for Late Saxon burials and it is looking increasingly likely that this part of the burial ground does not pre-date the Norman Conquest – we won’t have definitive evidence for this, however, until a programme of radiocarbon dating after the excavation is completed. If this is true, it raises interesting questions about the foundation date of the church. The earliest reference to St Martin’s Church by name is 1220 and the burial ground may only pre-date this by decades rather than centuries. Does this mean the church was founded after the Norman Conquest? Or was it founded earlier without a burial ground? Or have we simply not found the earliest part of the burial ground?

For the most part, these medieval burials are very simple, earth-dug graves containing a shroud-wrapped body placed directly into the ground. Coffins, occasionally distinguishable by lines of iron nails or a bed of ash beneath the body, are uncommon and are typically rectangular or trapezoidal boxes. ‘Ash burials’ have previously been recorded in Leicester during the excavation of St Peter’s churchyard (today beneath the Highcross shopping centre). Given that the ash is only found in coffins, the rite appears to be associated with more affluent members of the parish and at St Peter’s and elsewhere it appears to be a practice which dates from the late 13th century through to the mid-15th century.
Photograph 3. **An archaeologist excavates a medieval burial. The coffin outline is defined by a layer of ash beneath the skeleton. Image: ULAS.**

The ash may have been used to help counter foul odours and soak up fluids produced during putrefaction, especially if there was to be a delay prior to burial. However, as it was not used in every coffin it may have also served more than just a practical purpose. The practice is reminiscent of the sentiments “Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Genesis 3:19) and “They shall lie down alike in the dust, and the worms shall cover them” (Job 21:26) and it is possible inclusion of ash in a coffin was part of a rite associated with repentance and humility.

Some of our earliest un-coffined burials contain arrangements of stones deliberately placed around the body, including ‘pillow stones’ supporting the head and stones placed intermittently around the edge of the grave. These likely supported a cover of wooden boards or planks over the body or provided protection for the head, framing it and making it a focal point of the burial. Certainly the head was important in medieval liturgy, particularly in the 12th century, with emphasis on a person’s place of burial being where their head was buried. Other suggestions, that the stones could represent the tomb of Christ or the supports for Jacob’s ladder to heaven, are more tenuous.

Photograph 4. **Excavation of a burial with 'pillow stones' supporting the head. Image: ULAS.**

Regardless of the exact meaning, what we see in the inclusion of ash and stones with these burials is a carefully thought through burial rite. This can also be seen in the posture of the skeleton in the ground, laid out neatly with the arms either placed beside the body, or clasped over the pelvis or crossed over the chest. These are not hasty burials. Instead, considerable thought and respect has gone into the interment of the body in the ground.

During excavation, many of these skeletons show few signs of how they lived and died (this information will come through later analysis) but there have been poignant discoveries: a broken leg which hasn’t healed properly, leaving the person permanently disabled; someone with scoliosis more severe than King Richard III’s; a mother who died during labour; an infant buried cradled in an adult’s arms, a parent perhaps; and a child with a craniotomy, evidence of an autopsy, to mention a few. Children, from new-borns to adolescents, make up approximately a third of the burial assemblage and illustrate how precarious childhood can be in societies without modern medicine.
Photograph 5. An archaeologist excavates the burial of an adult and infant. The adult’s head is supported by stones and they are cradling the infant over their left chest and shoulder. Image: ULAS

The burial ground was not established on virgin land, Leicester is a city which is over 2,000 years old. The earliest graves are dug into gravel surfaces, possibly early medieval or Roman yard surfaces, and large pits, probably dug to quarry sand, gravel and clay, are also present. The pits had an impact on the burial ground, and at least one was probably re-used as a burial pit. They have also caused considerable damage to the underlying Roman archaeology, but what lies beneath the burial ground must be left to a future post.

Mathew Morris MA ACIfA
Project Officer
Archaeological Services (ULAS)
University of Leicester

4 November 2022
Updated time lapse video showing progress during October

Updated video from the time lapse camera outside the Cathedral shows the ongoing archaeological excavations being undertaken by the University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) to enable the construction of the basement for the new visitor and learning centre extension.

Archaeologists have now carefully unearthed more than 800 complete burials, showing how important this place has been to local people for centuries. At present, none of the burials appear to be earlier than the 12th century, suggesting the burial ground started in the post-conquest period.

Roman archaeology is visible and looks to be simple and straightforward, so it is currently anticipated all archaeology excavation will be finished by January 2023.

The video can be seen below:

https://vimeo.com/764227055/7b61a59d64
External stonework repair and restoration is now complete so the scaffolding will be removed over the coming weeks. The last element of this work was the rebuilding of two large buttresses on the southeast corner.

Inside the Cathedral plaster repair is underway along with paint sampling and testing for the roof timbers and limewash for the walls. The internal time lapse camera has been relocated to the top of the scaffolding at the west end of the nave to record the redecoration work when it gets underway.

Simon Bentley
Project Director for Leicester Cathedral Revealed
simon.bentley@leicestercofe.org

14 October 2022
Works progressing to North Porch floor

A new waterproof concrete floor slab has now been laid in the North Porch, and this also provides a solid ceiling to the boiler room below.

Onto this, a new stone and ceramic tile floor will be formed and landscaping works adjacent to the porch will enable un-stepped access to be achieved.

Some of the external scaffolding on the south side of the Cathedral has been removed offering a glimpse of the completed external stonework repair and restoration, including the new Wyvern grotesque (next to the flagpole). The remaining scaffolding will be dismantled over the coming weeks.

Inside the Cathedral the internal ‘birdcage’ scaffolding has now been fully erected to enable high-level internal works such as new lighting and redecoration to get underway.

Simon Bentley
Project Director for Leicester Cathedral Revealed
simon.bentley@leicestercofe.org
3 October 2022
Updated time lapse videos showing progress during September

Updated video from the time lapse camera outside the Cathedral shows the ongoing archaeological excavations being undertaken by the University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) to enable the construction of the basement for the new visitor and learning centre extension. If you look carefully, you can spot various visiting groups using the specially constructed platform at the far end of the site to view the excavations.

There were some technical issues with the time lapse camera inside the Cathedral during the month. The footage shows internal scaffolding being erected to enable high-level internal works such as new lighting and redecoration to get underway.

The videos can be seen below.

External:

Internal

Simon Bentley
Project Director for Leicester Cathedral Revealed
simon.bentley@leicestercofe.org

21 September 2022
Searching for the medieval church

University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) are undertaking the archaeological excavation for Leicester Cathedral Revealed. In his latest blog, archaeology site director Mathew Morris updates us on the archaeological work undertaken inside the Cathedral.

Previous blogs have focused on the archaeological work for the Cathedral’s new visitor and learning centre, and this is only one part of the Leicester Cathedral Revealed project. Our work inside the Cathedral is what we call a watching brief and involves the monitoring of any groundwork which has the potential to disturb burials and archaeological remains. This has predominately focused on the removal of the old floors and heating ducts, and the installation of new below-floor services in the Cathedral’s nave, aisles and transepts, and in St Dunstan’s Chapel.

At times, the Cathedral interior has resembled a battlefield, and photos of the work look shocking when contrasted with the Cathedral we are more familiar with.

**Photograph 1.** Work inside the Cathedral has included the removal of old floors and installation of new below-floor services.
However, what has become clear is that the ground beneath the Cathedral has already been extensively reworked, most likely during the restoration of the building in the latter half of the 19th century.

**Photograph 2. Workmen digging the trench for a heating duct in the Cathedral’s nave in 1926.**
*Image: Leicester Cathedral*

Most of the current groundwork has only disturbed modern rubble or a loose soil which contains a small amount of disarticulated human bone. Overall, the impression is that the upper half-metre of soil beneath the Cathedral has been deliberately cleared of burials sometime in the past, possibly during the 19th-century restoration.

Around a dozen burials have been found, however, either in brick-lined graves or about a metre below floor level. In every instance we have been able to find a solution which allows them to remain undisturbed *in-situ*. Most were in lead-lined coffins, which contrasts with our excavation outside where, to date, no lead coffins have been found.

The oldest of these burials, dating to the late 18th century, was recorded in the south aisle close to St George’s Chapel. Here an earth fast lead coffin had a lead nameplate fixed to its lid, engraved ‘Miss Ann Tozer, Died 11 June 1782, Aged 28’. Nearby, in front of the south door, another named burial, this time in a brick-lined grave, was that of Elizabeth Nedham, who died February 1st, 1848, aged 65. Miss Nedham is still commemorated on a memorial above the south door alongside her parents and sister. Nedham Street in Leicester is also named after the family. The third burial we have been able to name inside the Cathedral, again in a brick-lined grave, is that of ‘George Brushfield Hodges, Died March 28th 1841, Aged 67 Years’. Mr Hodges was a former mayor of Leicester and has a memorial on the wall in St Dunstan’s Chapel adjacent to his burial spot.

**Photograph 3. The lead coffin of Ann Tozer. The coffin may have once been inside a wooden outer shell. Fixed to the lid was a lead nameplate engraved ‘Miss Ann Tozer, Died 11 June 1782, Aged 28’. Images: ULAS**

Other archaeology was scarce but a number of really useful observations about the Cathedral’s history have been noted. This part of the restoration has highlighted just how much of the building was rebuilt in the 19th century. The columns in the nave arcades all rest on modern concrete footings, the stone walls of the north transept and St Dunstan’s Chapel rest on two courses of modern bricks and the wall of the north aisle rests on a concrete beam. In fact, the only walls which are identifiably medieval (foundation and superstructure) are the south and east walls of the Great South Aisle.

The building, however, is much older than its restoration. It was first mentioned by name in AD 1220 and may be several hundred years older than that, making the discovery of two other medieval walls beneath the present Cathedral’s floor exciting. These include an east/west orientated wall running along the north side the nave which may be the footing of
the original medieval nave wall. If so, it shows that the nave was widened sometime in the past because the pillars of the north arcade are now situated beyond the original line of the wall.

**Photograph 4.** Early stone walls found beneath the Cathedral’s floors. On the left, a stone wall running east/west adjacent to the rebuilt Victorian arcade between the nave and the north aisle may be an original wall of the medieval church. On the right, a north/south wall crossing St Dunstan’s Chapel reveals that the chapel was originally much smaller than it is today. Images: ULAS

The other, a north/south orientated wall in St Dunstan’s Chapel suggests that in its original form the chapel was a third shorter than it is today and has been enlarged eastwards some time before the 19th century restoration (when it was rebuilt from the ground up). These are fascinating new insights into the Cathedral which will be invaluable in our efforts to tell its story from its original construction through to the present day.

Mathew Morris MA ACIfA  
Project Officer  
Archaeological Services (ULAS)  
University of Leicester

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**2 September 2022**  
**Works underway to North Porch floor**

Work has begun to replace the floor of the North Porch, removing the old and defective structure and enabling un-stepped access to be achieved. The initial stage of the work has created a large hole, clearly visible from Guildhall Lane (see photograph), attracting lots of interest from passersby.

The work is being carefully undertaken without disturbing the stone bases to the porch and the structure above, including the lime render pargetted panels on either side of the porch and the impressive and unusual wooden medieval vaulted ceiling.

A new floor slab will provide a solid ceiling to the boiler room below and onto this a new stone and ceramic tile floor will be formed, complete with drainage. New external gate posts and gates to the North Porch will also be fitted.
19 August 2022
Updated time lapse videos showing progress during July

Updated video from the time lapse camera outside the Cathedral shows the ongoing archaeological excavations to enable the construction of the basement for the new visitor and learning centre extension. The work is being undertaken by the University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) with the excavation area fully covered to provide weather protection.

Video from the time lapse camera inside the Cathedral shows the limecrete floor slab being laid. Limecrete creates a breathable floor base, is durable with some flex and so a good alternative to concrete, particularly in heritage buildings. The limecrete has now cured and hardened sufficiently for internal scaffolding to be erected that will enable the high-level internal works such as new lighting and redecoration.

Further into the construction programme, once the internal scaffolding has been removed, an attractive new stone floor, level throughout and including energy-efficient underfloor heating will be installed on top of the limecrete slab.

The videos can be seen below.

External:

Internal:

5 August 2022
A tragic case of manslaughter

University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) are undertaking the archaeological excavation for Leicester Cathedral Revealed. In his latest blog, archaeology site director Mathew Morris presents some fascinating research on John Wilson Ottey - the first burial the archaeological team were able to identify by name during the initial phase of archaeological excavation and investigation. Mathew’s research discovered that John Ottey was involved in a tragic incident when he was a young man, resulting in him being charged with manslaughter.
You can read Mathew’s blog here: https://ulasnews.com/2022/07/29/leicester-cathedral-revealed-a-tragic-case-of-manslaughter/

The remains of John Wilson Ottey were found in a grave close to the St Martins East passageway, with a surviving brass coffin plate that had writing etched on its surface – ‘John Wilson Ottey, died 31st May 1851, aged 40’. In the year of his death, the 1851 Census lists him as living on Town Hall Lane (Guildhall Lane today), just the other side of the Cathedral, with his wife Susanna (aged 29) and a 13-year old domestic servant named Amy Geary. His occupation was ‘plumber and glazier’.

See the Project Director Update for 29 November 2021 for a full account of the discovery of the grave and initial research into John Wilson Ottey and his life and family circumstances, below.

Simon Bentley
Project Director for Leicester Cathedral Revealed
simon.bentley@leicestercofe.org
29 July 2022
Progress with the new floor

A limecrete slab has been laid inside the Cathedral to form the base for the new floor. Limecrete is a combination of natural hydraulic lime and lightweight aggregate or sand. It creates a breathable floor base allowing escape of water vapour, is durable with a certain amount of flex, and therefore a good alternative to concrete. These properties mean it is widely used to restore and protect heritage buildings.

The limecrete will need to cure for a few weeks so it hardens sufficiently for the internal scaffolding to be erected that will enable the high level internal works such as new lighting and redecoration.

Further into the construction programme, once the internal scaffolding has been removed, an attractive new stone floor, level throughout and including energy-efficient underfloor heating will be installed on top of the limecrete slab.

Simon Bentley
Project Director for Leicester Cathedral

11 July 2022
Updated time lapse videos showing progress during June

Updated video from the time lapse camera outside the Cathedral shows the resumption of major archaeological excavations to enable the construction of the basement for the new visitor and learning centre extension. The work is being undertaken by the University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) with the excavation area fully covered to provide weather protection.

Video from the time lapse camera inside the Cathedral shows underground services installation, concrete strengthening works between the arcade stone columns, and infilling, levelling, and grading to create the formation layer for the new floor.

The videos can be seen below.

External
In our day to day lives we tend to forget about our skeletons. However, they are absolutely crucial for everything that we do; they protect our organs, allow us to move, they store crucial minerals and nutrients, and produce blood. Rather than being static, bone is very much a living dynamic tissue that is constantly remodelling and adapting to keep us healthy and functioning. This process is affected by many things, including the environment, our nutrition as well as the physical activities we do. This relationship means that the skeleton can be a valuable source of evidence about these factors and social processes that might influence them.


Osteoarchaeologists, or biological anthropologists, specialise in the detailed analysis of skeletal material (bones and teeth). They are trained to know every ‘lump’ or ‘bump’ in the skeletal system and to understand the normal and abnormal variation that can exist in human groups. They can also use biochemical approaches that allow them to look at the microstructure of bones and teeth which permit them to look in great detail about the lives of past people. Osteoarchaeologists can estimate sex, age, and height from the skeleton, as well as assess peoples’ diseases, diet, mobility, and genetic past. By bringing the data of multiple individuals together it is possible to look at the characteristics of a population, and comparisons with other groups or overtime can show how key social factors have influenced our lives and wellbeing throughout our evolutionary history. This could be anything from how did farming change our relationship with infectious pathogens, how did industrialisation impact physical health, or how has climate change influenced nutrition. These questions can be addressed at multiple scales from international to local. The individuals excavated from the cathedral will allow us to look at how the lives of people changed over time as Leicester went from being a small town through to an industrialised city.
Photograph 2. A researcher from the Tobacco, Health and History project measuring hand bones. (Images: Tobacco, Health and History Project/UoL)

As part of the Tobacco, Health and History project, we hope to undertake a series of analyses that will reveal information about the lives of the inhabitants of Late Medieval and Post Medieval Leicester, a time of significant social and economic change. One of the aims of the project is to learn about the tobacco use practices of people from 1600-1900 and how this impacted on peoples’ physical wellbeing.

Photograph 3. Two men smoking pipes. Ink drawing by S. Jenner, ca. 1850. (Image: Wellcome Collection)

We can tell whether people were using or were exposed to tobacco from their skeletons by using a combination of methods. The first is to simply look at the teeth of individuals to look for ‘pipe notches’. These notches are caused by the habitual holding of clay tobacco pipes in the teeth, usually while doing manual work. The clay pipe stems abrade the enamel away leaving a distinctive circular hole. We can sometimes also see tobacco staining on teeth. As not all types of tobacco use was with a pipe, the project has developed a method (metabolomics based) to assess for chemical signatures that relate to tobacco use in bone and teeth. This is the first time that we will get a direct and detailed picture of tobacco use practices within pre-20th century groups.

Photograph 4. Left: Teeth of an individual with a clear round hole caused by holding a clay pipe. Right: Lingual staining on inner surfaces of teeth from using a tobacco pipe. (Images: Tobacco, Health and History Project/UoL)

Once we know whether people were using tobacco, we can then compare this to what diseases we see on the skeleton. In particular, we are looking for evidence of respiratory diseases, oral pathologies, nutritional diseases, cancers and neoplasms. Already Don Walker and Michael Henderson (2010) has shown correlations between respiratory health and tobacco use in London and it would be interesting to see if the same pattern emerges in Leicester.

Photograph 5. Researchers from the Tobacco, Health and History project using a scanning electron microscope to explore microwear on teeth caused by clay pipe use (left) and preparing bone samples for analysis of small molecules relating to tobacco use (right). (Images: Tobacco, Health and History Project/UoL)

At the same time as assessing tobacco use and disease, we will also be assessing what sort of things Leicester people ate through their bone chemistry (stable isotope analysis), what other diseases and traumas they suffered from (perhaps through work or their living environment), how long did they live for and how tall they were. In conjunction with historical sources on life in Leicester, and of some that pertain directly to excavated individuals (e.g. censuses, Wills etc), we will be able to reconstruct Leicester life stories, or osteobiographies, an approach which builds up a picture of someone’s life using as many types of information as possible. This approach was used on Richard III, but is arguably far more valuable when applied to individuals for which we have limited historical information, especially the urban
working classes. Through this, we hope to reveal the lives of individuals from all walks of life from Leicester and to further our knowledge about its diverse community. We will compare this to other places, including London and Barton-upon-Humber to help show the unique situation of Leicester, and how life here compared with other places. This will help build up a more complex picture of life during the post medieval period in England, which saw huge disparities in wealth, core industries, lifestyles and health.

10 June 2022
Updated time lapse videos showing progress during May

Updated video from the time lapse camera outside the Cathedral shows further ground works to form the basement of the new visitor and learning centre extension. This includes completion of reinforced concrete capping and ground beams to form a stable foundation and spread the weight of the above ground structure of the new extension. Also shown is removal of old foundation blocks from the now demolished Song School building and preparation of the area to enable Phase 2 archaeological excavations to commence, including installing a full covering to provide weather protection.

If you look carefully, you will spot the workmen on the scaffolding on the south façade of the Cathedral undertaking external stonework repair and restoration works.

Video from the time lapse camera inside the Cathedral shows further works to reduce the floor level and excavation of service trenches – necessary preparatory works for the new stone floor and underfloor heating.

The videos can be seen below.

External:

Internal:

Simon Bentley
Project Director for Leicester Cathedral Revealed
simon.bentley@leicestercofe.org

1 June 2022
Phase 2 archaeology work underway

University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) have resumed major archaeological excavations at Leicester Cathedral to enable the construction of the basement for the new
visitor and learning centre extension. The excavation area has been fully covered to provide weather protection.

ULAS experts and colleagues from the University’s School of Archaeology and Ancient History hope to examine a cross section of the City’s history and learn more about the early foundation of the Cathedral – formerly the Parish Church of St Martin – on the site.

The archaeological excavations, up to two metres below ground level, will allow experts to track the history of this part of Leicester from the Victorian period through Medieval, Saxon, Roman and perhaps even to early Iron Age settlement.

Mathew Morris, Project Officer at ULAS is leading the excavations, and was also part of the team which unearthed the remains of Richard III in 2012, a stone’s throw from the Cathedral site.

The excavations are in an area of Leicester that ULAS rarely get to excavate and will be the first time that they have excavated a continuous cemetery sequence dating from the late Saxon period to the relatively recent past, giving a fantastic opportunity to investigate the story of Leicester through the lives of the people who lived and were buried there. The excavation will also give the team the chance to explore the origins of the Cathedral site, including the foundation of the original church and aspects of the Roman town which predated it.

The first phase of archaeology investigations took place in late 2021 and early 2022 with the ULAS team carefully uncovering more than 120 burials in the top-most layers on the site. The area was once used as the churchyard for burials of people from all walks of life living in the surrounding parish.

It is believed that there could be hundreds more burials on the site, which experts will need to painstakingly excavate by hand. Samples will then be tested by University of Leicester experts, which will reveal insights into the life of those who lived, worked and died in the City. Dr Sarah Inskip, a UKRI Future Leaders Fellow at the University of Leicester, will lead this work to study these remains, as part of a wider project to study the history of tobacco use from the 15th to 18th Centuries. Earlier burials will also be studied by experts from York Osteoarchaeology.

ULAS excavations are expected to last for several months, with post-excision analysis and reporting work then taking place. Once the project is completed, the remains will be carefully reinterred by Leicester Cathedral.

Simon Bentley
Project Director for Leicester Cathedral Revealed
simon.bentley@leicestercofe.org
18 May 2022

New grotesques arrive

Four new carved stone grotesques were welcomed to the Cathedral by specially invited guests on Wednesday 18 May.

The Leicester Cathedral Revealed project includes the repair and restoration of external stonework on the south façade and as part of that work, the new grotesques will be installed as an integral part of the parapet wall, to replace old, weather-worn ones.

The four carved creatures were selected by members of the Cathedral community to complement the fox and tiger grotesques installed in 2018, and further represent aspects of local history and culture.

See my previous update on 14 April for further background information about the inspiration behind the choice of the new grotesques.

The specially invited guests each had a connection to one of the creatures:

- **White Boar** – Iain Gordon, General Manager of the King Richard III Visitor Centre
- **Peregrine Falcon** – Jim Graham from Leicestershire and Rutland Ornithological Society
- **Wyvern** – Cllr Ted Cassidy who is also an Honorary Canon of Leicester Cathedral
- **Leicester Longwool Sheep** – Thomas Cole, President of the Leicester Longwool Sheep Breeders Association and Malcolm Britton, Honorary Canon of Leicester Cathedral

Skilled sculptor/carver Alan Necchi working for local firm Midland Stone Masonry carved all the grotesques applying a similar style and expression to form a ‘family’ of stone creatures on the south elevation. They will be installed over the next few weeks and will be visible when the scaffolding is removed later in the summer.

The new grotesques are funded with a grant from the Culture Recovery Fund for programmes of major works undertaken by specialist builders and craftspeople on churches and cathedrals. Match funding comes from the National Heritage Lottery Fund, Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme and the Dulverton Trust

I hope the complete family of grotesque creatures will be an encouraging sign that our Cathedral has an exciting future and that they form a fascinating building feature, revealing the living stories of Cathedral and its role as a beating heart for our City and County.
13 May 2022

Updated time lapse videos showing progress during April

Updated video from the time lapse camera outside the Cathedral shows further ground works to form the basement of the new visitor and learning centre extension. This includes removal of the guide wall used to install the 70 rotary piles that define the basement, cropping the top of these piles and testing their integrity, followed by installing a reinforced concrete capping beam on top. The capping beam increases the rigidity of the foundations and reduces movement to form a stable foundation and spread the weight of the above ground structure of the new extension.

Video from the time lapse camera inside the Cathedral shows removal of the floor slab and excavation work to reduce the floor level.

The videos can be seen below.

External

Internal

6 May 2022

Progress carving new grotesques

The new Leicester grotesques featuring a Longwool sheep and White Boar are taking shape nicely, as the accompanying photographs show.

See my previous update on 14 April for additional background information and photos.

It is anticipated that all four new grotesques will arrive at the Cathedral during week commencing 16 May for installation into the parapet wall high up on the south façade.

The grotesques are funded with a grant from the Culture Recovery Fund for programmes of major works undertaken by specialist builders and
craftspeop
le on churches and cathedrals. Match funding comes from the National Heritage
Lottery Fund and Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme.

Simon Bentley
Project Director for Leicester Cathedral Revealed
simon.bentley@leicestercofe.org

29 April 2022
Church walls and hints of Roman remains

Following completion of Phase 1 archaeological excavation University of
Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) have been monitoring the groundworks for
the new visitor and learning centre. Archaeology site director Mathew Morris
provides the latest update.

Over the past couple of months, we have been on site at the Cathedral intermittently
monitoring the construction of the piling wall and other footings for the new visitor and
learning centre. This work has given a tantalising preview of what might lie beneath the
graveyard.

The archaeological investigation is largely paused at present whilst we wait for the current
phase of groundwork to finish and give the space to start the next phase of excavation. In the
meantime, there has been great interest from the BBC about what we have found so far, and
there have been some new discoveries and hints of what might be to come.

There is very little we, as archaeologists, could do whilst the piling retaining wall was being
installed. The piling rig is an enormous auger, 60cm in diameter, boring down ten metres into
the ground. During the next phase of excavation, this piling wall will hold back the soil as the
basement area is excavated, making it safe to work without undermining the surrounding
buildings, and it will then form the wall of the basement itself and the foundation for the
building above. As the auger is removed, each hole is immediately pumped full of concrete
and a reinforcing steel cage is pushed in before it sets. During this process identifying
archaeology and archaeological artefacts is very difficult, and we have mostly been
recovering human remains from the displaced soil.

Photograph 1. The piling rig at work. (Image: ULAS)

That said, we have also had a few insights into what might be beneath the burials. The dark
cemetery soil is looking like it will be 1.5-2.5m thick. Beneath is a paler, sandier soil which
has produced some large sherds of Roman pottery and a small quantity of building material,
including roof tile and box flue (needed in buildings with hypocausts – Roman underfloor
heating). In several places the auger has also hit tightly packed granite rubble about 3.5m
below the ground. This might indicate that there are Roman wall footings still in place down
there.
Photograph 2. Roman pottery and building material recovered from the piling auger. (Image: ULAS)

Our knowledge of this area of the Roman town is still very limited, largely due to the fact that this is the historic quarter of the present city, with few opportunities for archaeological excavation nearby. We do know that a Roman building was found beneath the Cathedral tower and north transept when they were rebuilt in 1861. The discovery was reported in the second volume of the *Transactions of the Leicestershire Architectural and Archaeological Society* in 1870.

"The excavations at S. Martin's, Leicester, have brought to light many antiquities of great interest. Several considerable portions of the foundations of ancient walls have been discovered: and, upon removing the earth in July last on the north side of the church close to the palisading dividing the church ground from the Townhall Lane, the workmen came to a rubble wall of considerable thickness, surmounted by a wrought stone platform, upon which stood the bases of two massive Doric columns, each about two feet in diameter. These columns, in all probability, formed a portion of a colonnade, which, judging from their size and the space intervening between about ten feet would be one of considerable length. The earth in the interior also contained numerous fragments of Roman pottery, and the bones of animals and birds. Two coins the one of Nero, the other of Constantine were likewise turned up; the truth of the tradition that a Roman temple stood upon the site of the present church being thus, it is presumed, unequivocably proved." (TLAHS 2, 90)

Photograph 3. Drawings of the Roman remains found beneath the Cathedral in 1861. (Images: LAHS)

To say that this explicitly proved that there was a Roman temple beneath the Cathedral is a bit of a leap. In truth, the evidence could equally support a colonnade along a shop front, or the peristyle around a courtyard, or any number of other interpretations. This is what makes the new excavation so exciting. Here is a unique opportunity to see what this area of Roman Leicester was like.

Other groundwork, including the construction of a new ground beam close to the Cathedral, has revealed something of the original construction of the Cathedral’s Great South Aisle. At the end of the trench for a new ground beam, where the below-ground masonry for the east wall of the south aisle was exposed, a complex story of building and rebuilding was uncovered. You can explore it in this 3D model.
As we see it today, the south aisle was rebuilt, or at least the stonework was re-faced, during John Pearson’s restoration work in 1896-98 (find out more about the Cathedral’s restoration [here](https://sketchfab.com/3d-models/leicester-cathedral-south-aisle-8c95cf304e3c4fc7b727045159ad3d3c)). This was after St Dunstan’s Chapel was rebuilt from the foundations up during Raphael Brandon’s restorations in 1865-67. Beneath the Victorian wall, however, is part of the original medieval wall and foundation. The original aisle is thought to have been built in the late 13th or early 14th century. The roughly coursed wall was bonded with orange sandy mortar and was built from a mixture of local granite and sandstone, and also incorporated some recycled Roman brick (similar to the walls of St Nicholas’ Church next to the Jewry Wall). The medieval foundation used larger granite boulders bonded together with mud, and one of these foundation stones appears to be part of a recycled quern stone (used to grind grain into flour).

**Photograph 4.** The original medieval wall and foundation of the Great South Aisle. The large circular block of stone in the centre appears to be part of a recycled quern stone. (Image: ULAS)

Already we are getting invaluable new information on the construction and past use of the building, information which will enable us to better tell the story of the Cathedral site and help the Cathedral better plan for the future maintenance of this important historic City building.

**Mathew Morris MA ACIfA**  
*Project Officer*  
Archaeological Services (ULAS)  
University of Leicester

14 April 2022  
**New Grotesques**

An important element of *Leicester Cathedral Revealed* now underway is the repair and restoration of external stonework on the south façade.

An exciting part of this is replacing four badly weathered and deteriorated grotesques, to complement the fox and tiger grotesques installed in 2018.
Skilled and experienced stone carvers from Midland Stone Masonry who created the fox and tiger grotesques will carve the new ones, applying a similar style and expression to form a ‘family’ of grotesques on the south elevation.

Following suggestions from members of the Cathedral community the new grotesques will feature a Leicester Longwool Sheep, Peregrine Falcon, White Boar and Wyvern to further represent local history and culture.

The new grotesques will be carved from Peak Moor stone, as were the fox and tiger and will be installed in the next few months.

A visit this week to the carving workshop showed encouraging progress.

Photograph: Caption - New Peregrine Falcon grotesque (with the plaster model or maquette that the stone carver works from) awaiting final carving and finishing

**Peregrine Falcons** are now an established feature at Leicester Cathedral and in the city centre – their exploits, behaviour and ecology attract much interest and comment.

[Image of a Peregrine Falcon]


The figure of a reptilian beast – known as a **Wyvern** – is carved into many of the Victorian buildings in Leicester as well as sitting on top of the Town Hall itself. It is also on top of the Clock Tower and the Corn Exchange building in the form of a weather vain. The origin of the word wyvern comes from thirteenth-century word wyver, which is derived from the French wyvere, meaning both "viper" and "life." Leicester’s wyvern connection originates from 1619 when the Arms of the City of Leicester were confirmed during a Heraldic Visitation. Originally consisting of a simple cinquefoil with a battle-scarred wyvern perched on top, the inspiration for the design came from motifs that were associated with the city’s historic earls.

[Image of a Wyvern]

A **White Boar** was the personal device or badge of King Richard III and an early instance of the use of boars in heraldry. Livery badges were important symbols of political affiliation in the Wars of the Roses, and Richard distributed very large numbers at his coronation and the installation of his son Edward as Prince of Wales, for which an order of 13,000 badges in fustian cloth is recorded.

[Image of a White Boar]

**Leicester Longwool sheep** date back to the 1700s, and were found in the Midland counties of England, originally developed in Dishley Grange, Leicestershire by Robert Bakewell. Bakewell was the foremost exponent of modern animal-breeding techniques in the selection of livestock. The Leicester Longwool in the 1700s was slow-growing and coarsely boned. They now have been developed to gain weight quickly and are fast-growing. Leicester
Longwool was one of the first pure sheep breeds introduced to Australia, having been introduced in 1826. The Leicester Longwool has been used to improve many sheep breeds because of its meaty carcass and heavy fleece.

Simon Bentley

[caption id="attachment_6642" align="alignright" width="225"] Stone carver at work on the new White Boar grotesque[/caption]

Project Director for Leicester Cathedral Revealed
simon.bentley@leicestercofe.org

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8 April 2022
Updated time lapse videos showing progress during March

Updated video from the time lapse camera outside the Cathedral shows the rotary piling work that has bored the 70 deep holes needed to form the contiguous piled wall that defines the basement of the new visitor and learning centre extension.

If you look carefully you may also spot the top of the scaffolding being wrapped to protect the uncovered and exposed parapet during external stonework repair and restoration works.

Video from the time lapse camera inside the Cathedral shows completion of asbestos removal, further trial holes being dug to investigate floor structure and removal of floor coverings prior to excavation work getting underway to reduce the floor level.

The videos can be seen below.

External

Internal

Simon Bentley
Project Director for Leicester Cathedral Revealed
simon.bentley@leicestercofe.org
24 March 2022

Rotary piling and external stonework

It has been a busy and fairly noisy few weeks for Leicester Cathedral Revealed.

A rotary piling rig has been on site boring the 70 deep holes needed to form the contiguous piled wall that defines the basement of the new visitor and learning centre extension.

Repair and restoration of external stonework on the south façade is now underway, with the top section of the scaffolding wrapped to prevent water ingress along the uncovered and exposed parapet during wet weather.

An exciting part of these works we will be replacing four badly weathered and deteriorated grotesques, to complement the fox and tiger grotesques installed in 2018.

Following suggestions from members of the Cathedral community the new grotesques will feature a Leicester Longwool Sheep, Peregrine Falcon, White Boar and Wyvern to further represent local history and culture.

The same stone carver that created the fox and tiger grotesques will create the new ones, applying a similar style and expression to form a ‘family’ of grotesques on the south elevation.

There will be more on this in a future update.

Inside the Cathedral, asbestos removal has been completed and work has now commenced on stripping out the old mechanical and electrical infrastructure, removing floor coverings and reducing the level to enable the new underfloor heating system to be installed.

Simon Bentley
Project Director for Leicester Cathedral Revealed
simon.bentley@leicestercofe.org
10 March 2022
It’s the coffin they’ll carry you off in

At present University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) are waiting to resume their excavation at Leicester Cathedral. Work hasn’t stopped, however, and over the past couple of months they have been on site as needed monitoring groundwork for the installation of the piled basement wall for the new visitor and learning centre. Work is also progressing behind the scenes and the examination of the first burials has started - a closer look at the work of the analysis team will be covered in a future update.

Meanwhile, archaeology site director Mathew Morris has been promising a blog post on coffins and here it is...

The people of Leicester have been burying their dead in coffins for over 1,800 years. In the town’s Roman cemeteries nearly half of the burials were in wooden coffins and discoveries of lead coffins are described in antiquarian reports. Wooden coffins were also used in the medieval period, although they weren’t as common (none were found during the excavation of St Michael’s church and only 3% of the burials at St Peter’s church were in coffins). Lead coffins and stone sarcophagi were rarely used, although examples have been excavated in the town, most recently at the church of the Grey Friars.

These early coffins, usually only identifiable by regularly spaced iron nails framing a burial, were rectangular or trapezoidal. Construction was simple, with the end and side boards nailed or pegged to a single base board to create a flat-lidded box.

Photograph 1. The archaeology of coffins. Top: An exceptionally well preserved Roman coffin from Great Holme Street (1976). The rectangular wooden box was constructed from planks held together with wooden pegs. Bottom left: The shape of a trapezoidal medieval wooden coffin at St Peter’s Church (2005) is still clearly visible because of a layer of ash spread across the bottom of the coffin. The ash may have been a symbol of repentance and humility, or may have been to counter foul odours and soak up fluids. Bottom right: A medieval stone sarcophagus with an inner lead casket buried beneath the sanctuary of the church of the Grey Friars (2013). It contained the remains of a high status lady, probably a benefactor of the friary. Images: ULAS

In most instances, people in the Roman and medieval town were shrouded or wrapped in a winding sheet before burial, with use of a coffin an indicator of more elevated status than burial without. Following the Reformation in England in the 16th century, however, and the abolishment of the doctrine of Purgatory, commemoration and remembrance moved away from the need to pray for the dead and focused more on the deceased and what they were buried in. By the end of the 17th century, use of coffins was more universal and decorating their exterior became increasingly important in conveying individuality and status.

Towards the end of the 16th century a new coffin shape became popular. Called a single-break coffin, it was widest at the shoulders and tapered towards the head and feet (the classic
‘coffin’ shape). From the 17th century, the flat-lidded single-break coffin was the standard form. It’s not clear why this more complex shape was favoured over a simple rectangular box but, as it is only used in funerary contexts, it may have been adopted as a distinctive container by a burgeoning commercial funeral industry.

**Photograph 2.** An archaeologist excavates a burial at Leicester Cathedral. Whilst the coffin wood doesn’t survive, the coffin shape is still visible in the soil. The rust-coloured ovals are the backs of the coffin handles. Image: ULAS

So far, our burials at Leicester Cathedral have all been from the 18th and 19th centuries, with the earliest dating from 1738 and the most recent 1855. All were buried in single-break coffins and we have already noticed a number of distinct styles. Wood doesn’t survive well in Leicester’s soils and only a few samples have been recovered from some of the brick-lined graves. These have yet to be examined but coffins were traditionally made of elm, although oak or more exotic woods were also used and pine was often a cheaper substitute. The wooden boards were typically butt-joined and fixed together with glue and/or nails and wooden pegs, and we have noticed that whilst some of our burials did contain coffin nails, others didn’t despite there being other obvious signs that a coffin was present (e.g. coffin handles), suggesting glue or other carpentry techniques were being used.

Undertakers were usually carpenters, cabinetmakers or upholsterers by trade, who did undertaking as a side-line. Our earliest coffins reflect this, with the external decoration and writing picked out with dome-headed brass upholstery tacks. This practice first developed in the late 17th century and was primarily used to secure a fabric cover to the coffin’s exterior with single or double rows of tacks creating framed panels around the coffin handles (called grips in the trade). Sometimes the tacks were also used to spell out the initials, age and year of death on the coffin lid.

**Photograph 3.** Top: an archaeologist excavates the remains of a coffin lid decorated with brass coffin studs. Bottom: The finished excavation. Whilst much of the coffin lid was missing, three lines of letters and numbers were still partially visible. The bottom number is probably the date of death, ‘[1]738’. Images: ULAS.

By the mid-18th century, cast and die-stamped metal coffin fittings were increasingly available and affordable and largely replaced the use of coffin studs to convey information. Coffin embellishments included a name plate (also called a depositum plate or breast plate), other decorative lid motifs and escutcheons for side decoration, grips (handles) and decorative grip plates.

**Photograph 4.** A Victorian coffin decorated with coffin studs, a nameplate, lid motifs, escutcheons on the sides, and decorative grips and grip plates.

Many of our late 18th and 19th century burials have coffin furniture like this. Most coffins had a name plate, usually made of iron although we have had two examples in brass. More elaborate coffins were covered with a felt-like fabric fixed down with coffin studs or coffin ‘lace’ (bands of tin-dipped stamped iron in assorted decorative patterns, for outlining the lid, sides, and ends of a coffin). Some were augmented with other lid motifs.
By the early 19th century, Birmingham had become the main centre of coffin furniture production in Britain, with undertakers ordering from trade catalogues and pattern books. One of our coffins had grips stamped with the mark of Edward Lingard, a Birmingham manufacturer in the early 19th century.

The cost of coffin furniture varied depending on the material used and the finish. Most of the fittings from our cemetery are the less-expensive tin-dipped iron (called ‘white’ in the trade) or black-painted iron. Unfortunately, this does not survive well in the ground and is usually in too poor a condition to lift intact. Personal information was also painted on the name plates rather than engraved and does not survive, meaning most of our burials will remain nameless. The exception has been two engraved rectangular brass nameplates, which survive better.

Patterns were often hard to decipher through the corrosion but the name plates were usually shield-shaped or oval and surrounded by classical embellishments of drapery and vines, or other foliage. Some may have incorporated winged cherub’s heads or angels with trumpets and included a crown at the top.

Looking through 18th and 19th century coffin furniture pattern books, we can see that there was a lot of choice, which could be mixed and matched to personal taste. Coffin grips and their decorative backing plates are a good example of this, coming in many shapes and sizes. Most adult-sized coffins had eight grips, three to each side and one at each end, whilst smaller coffins typically had six.

This variation can be seen best in two contemporary coffins from adjacent brick-lined graves close to the south aisle of the cathedral. One was for Anne Barratt, who I’ve previously written about, the other for an Elizabeth Sturgess. Both died in 1855, Anne was 68, Elizabeth was 74. Anne’s coffin was very well preserved. It was covered with red coloured fabric which was held in place by rows of decorative iron coffin tacks, painted black. Other metalwork included eight decorative grip plates with handles, also painted black, whilst the nameplate was a simple engraved brass plate. In contrast, Elizabeth’s coffin, whilst poorly preserved, showed no evidence of having a cloth cover (no coffin tacks or coffin ‘lace’) and it was adorned with tin-dipped iron furniture, including a name plate, two additional decorative lid motifs and eight grip plates with handles. The writing on the nameplate was painted in gold and white on a black background.
Photograph 8. The rectangular brass nameplate on Anne Barratt’s coffin (left) and the more decorative tin-dipped iron nameplate on Elizabeth Sturgess’s coffin (right). Images: ULAS

The variety, quantity and quality of these fittings was probably predicated on the taste, wealth and aspirations of the deceased’s family. As we excavate more of the burial ground, the Leicester Cathedral Revealed project will give us a fascinating insight into the changing use and style of coffins in Leicester, and the history of the town’s funerary trade. Previous excavations in the city have examined medieval cemeteries and 19th century cemeteries but for the first time this project will enable us to examine a continuous burial sequence from the early medieval period through to the mid-19th century, giving us a unique opportunity to chart how coffins and burial practices have evolved over the past 1,000 years.

Mathew Morris MA ACIfA
Project Officer
Archaeological Services (ULAS)
University of Leicester

3 March 2022
Updated time lapse videos showing progress during February

Updated video from the time lapse camera outside the Cathedral shows continuing ground works for construction of the basement of the new visitor and learning centre extension. These works include probing to check the proposed pile locations for obstructions and voids and installation of the piling mat and guide wall in preparation for the arrival of the rotary piling rig. This will bore the holes for installation of the contiguous piled wall that will define the basement of the new building.

Video from the time lapse camera inside the Cathedral shows asbestos removal, with a specialist contractor working within special enclosures to take out the asbestos lagging on old heating pipes and ducts. It also shows test pits being dug to assess the composition of the floor in preparation for the reduced level excavation necessary to install the underfloor heating and then the new level floor throughout.

The videos can be seen below.

Simon Bentley
Project Director for Leicester Cathedral Revealed
simon.bentley@leicestercofe.org
24 February 2022
Scaffolding, groundworks and asbestos removal

Scaffolding has been erected on the south side of the Cathedral to enable urgent repair and restoration of external stonework, addressing serious issues with stone defects and weathered stonemasonry and improved safety for the public.

This is being undertaken as a discrete project within Leicester Cathedral Revealed with a grant from the Culture Recovery Fund for programmes of major works undertaken by specialist builders and craftspersons on churches and cathedrals. Match funding comes from the National Heritage Lottery Fund and Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme.

The scaffolding has enabled a bird’s-eye view of the ground works for the new learning and visitor centre extension. The photograph shows construction of the guide wall that is necessary for the accurate installation of a contiguous piled wall that will define the basement of the new centre. Within this, Phase 2 of the archaeological excavation and investigation can then be safely undertaken. This will commence in April and could take up to 6 months.

Inside the Cathedral asbestos removal is now well underway, with a specialist contractor working within special enclosures to take out the asbestos lagging on old heating pipes and ducts. This should be completed in the next couple of weeks and then the next phase will be stripping out the old mechanical and electrical infrastructure, removing floor coverings and reducing the level to enable the new underfloor heating system to be installed.

Simon Bentley
Project Director for Leicester Cathedral Revealed
simon.bentley@leicestercofe.org

10 February 2022
Updated time lapse videos

Updated video from the time lapse cameras outside the Cathedral shows the completion of Phase 1 of the archaeological excavation and the start of ground works, including probing to checking the proposed pile locations for obstructions and voids before the piling rig arrives on site. A contiguous piled wall will be installed that will define the basement of the new visitor and learning centre extension. Within this, further archaeological excavation and investigation can be then be safely undertaken.

Video from the time lapse camera inside the Cathedral shows the decant, storage and protection operation to make the Cathedral ready for internal repair, restoration and renewal works.
The videos can be seen below.

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**31 January 2022**

**Anne Barratt (1786–1855)**

Following the Christmas break, University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) have been back on site for a couple of weeks and have now completed Phase 1 of the archaeological excavation and investigation, with a total of 124 burials excavated.

Ground works have now started, including installation of a contiguous piled wall that will define the basement of the new visitor and learning centre extension. Within this, further archaeological excavation and investigation can be then be safely undertaken and ULAS will be back in the spring for Phase 2.

Mathew Morris, the archaeology team leader for Leicester Cathedral Revealed, recently gave a very interesting and well received online talk about the Phase 1 archaeology work.

The talk was recorded and is now available to view on the ULAS YouTube channel - https://youtu.be/f8YENDuMIT4

In his latest blog below, Mathew tells us about our second named individual, Anne Barratt, whose grave was uncovered during Phase 1.

Everyone in Leicester has a connection with Richard III, people have grown up being told stories about him, watched his reburial, visited his tomb in the Cathedral or parked on his grave. But how does this relate to our project? Well, Anne Barratt also had a connection with the king, although we don’t know if she knew about the link herself.

Before Christmas we excavated the last brick-lined in our area of work. These are exactly what they sound like, a brick burial chamber built to house a coffin. Some are multi-tiered and were intended as family vaults. Others are single chambers and the added expense of constructing a brick-lined vault for the burial is usually taken as evidence of the wealth and aspirations of the deceased’s family. We have excavated ten altogether, scattered amongst the mid-19th century burial rows.

**Photo 1. The brick-lined grave and wooden coffin of Anne Barratt. Note that her grave was dug through an earlier burial, a testament to how crowded the burial ground was in the 29th century. Image: ULAS**

Anne Barratt was buried in a brick-lined grave close to the south aisle. Her coffin-shaped vault was sealed with slate and sandstone capping stones. Inside, the brickwork was rendered with white paint giving it a clean, clinical appearance and the coffin was exceptionally well preserved with a brass nameplate on the lid inscribed ‘ANNE BARRATT, BORN 23RD NOVEMBER 1786, DIED 16TH NOVEMBER 1855’.
Our research reveals that Anne was the youngest of eight children of John and Jane Barratt. John Barratt (b.1740) was a wealthy Leicester hosier – hosiery was Leicester’s staple industry. He married Jane Andrew in 1771 and that same year he bought a fine new townhouse on Friar Lane, spending a total of £1,150 on the property. The house still stands today, at 17 Friar Lane, and is considered ‘the handsomest Georgian house now left in the town’. Its garden, now a rather famous car park, stretched north towards St Martin’s covering the area where Richard III’s remains were uncovered in 2012, and the Barratt children would have grown up playing over the king’s grave. Were they aware that this was the site of Richard III’s burial? We don’t know and by the 18th century the story was widespread that the king’s body had been dug up thrown into the River Soar. It’s a connection nevertheless and demonstrates how interconnected we are with our past.

The Barratt’s first child, named John, was born in 1773, followed by Joseph (b.1774), Jane (b.1775), Thomas (b.1777), Mary (b.1779), Sarah (b.1781), Elizabeth (b.1784) and finally Anne (b.1786). All eight children were baptised in St Martin’s church. So far, we have found very few records for the three eldest and it is probable that they died young leaving Thomas heir to his father’s hosiery business. A Leicester trade directory of 1815 lists Barratt & Son trading from Friar Lane, with Thomas Barratt, hosier, living in Humberstone Gate with a warehouse in Friar Lane.

The three older surviving siblings, Thomas, Mary and Sarah, all married but the two younger sisters, Elizabeth and Anne, never wed. What Anne did for much of her life remains a mystery. Surviving records describe her as a ‘landholder’ and a ‘gentlewoman’, meaning she was independently wealthy and of good social standing. In her Will she left legacies to the Leicester Infirmary and to the ‘Society in Leicester for the relief of the poor’ whilst contemporary newspapers periodically mention her subscriptions to local charitable causes, including in 1836 the construction of a new church, Christ Church, on Bow Street in Leicester and its school for poor children.

Whilst Anne’s parents were alive, they undoubtedly provided financial support for their unmarried daughter. By today’s standards, the Barratt’s were millionaires. John Barratt was a successful businessman with property as well as stock in both the Ellesmere and the Union canals. Anne’s mother died in 1824 (aged 78) and her father (aged 85) died the following year. In his Will, John left Anne over £4000 (at least £300,000 today), ensuring her future financial independence. Thomas inherited his father’s property and business, including 17 Friar Lane, whilst Anne’s other sisters received similar cash legacies. Anne continued living at Friar Lane.

Anne’s sister Elizabeth died in 1835 (aged 50) and Thomas died in 1839 (aged 62). Both were buried at St Martin’s and both are remembered on memorials in St Dunstan’s chapel, as
are their parents. Thomas bequeathed 17 Friar Lane to his daughter Mary Jane, who lived there with her husband, the Rev. Richard Fawsett (rector of Christ Church, the church Anne had helped to finance), until they moved to Smeeton Westerby in 1852. Subsequently, the house was leased to a Dr Benfield who eventually purchased the property in 1866.

We don’t have another reference of Anne until 1851, when the census records her living with her sister Mary. Mary had married a Leicester attorney called Beaumont Burnaby Esq in 1798. In 1824, Burnaby bought The Grey Friars, the house next door to the Barratt family home. The Grey Friars was built by the prosperous Leicester alderman Robert Herrick in the late 16th century on the site of the medieval Franciscan friary (where Richard III was originally buried). Subsequent owners enlarged the house until it was the largest private residence in Leicester. Following Beaumont Burnaby’s death in 1848 it passed to Mary. Under Mary’s ownership the house was divided in two, with Mary living in the larger, western part until her death in 1885.

Photo 5. The Grey Friars in 1865, whilst Mary Burnaby was still in residence. Anne spent her last year’s living here with her sister. Image: greyfriarsheritage.org.uk

In 1851, Mary was living at The Grey Friars with Anne, supported by five servants – a footman, a cook, two housemaids and a kitchen maid. Anne passed away four years later. She was 68. Her death certificate records that she died at home of ‘chronic disease of the stomach with ulceration’. Her niece, Mary Jane Fawsett was with her when she died.

Anne was buried shortly after November 16, 1855. Her wooden coffin was covered with red or black coloured fabric which was held in place by rows of decorative coffin studs. Other metalwork included eight decorative grip plates with handles, fixed three to a side and at either end, whilst the engraved brass nameplate was fixed to the flat lid.

Photo 7. The head end of Anne Barratt’s coffin was remarkably well preserved. In this image the cloth covering, rows of decorative coffins studs and one of the grip plates and handle can be seen. Image: ULAS

The coffin was double-shelled (one coffin inside another), an added expense, and was lined inside with padded fabric. Little of Anne’s body remained but she was probably laid out in a shift-like shroud and she was wearing woollen stockings – the storyteller in me would like to say that they were made by her family’s hosiery business but I don’t know that for certain! Her burial ensemble was finished off with a frilled cloth wrapped around her head and she was wearing earrings.

Photo 8. Top: the frilled cloth wrapped around Anne Barratt’s head. Left: A detail of one of Anne Barratt’s woollen stockings. Right: One of Anne Barratt’s earrings with a faceted stone. Images: ULAS

She remained a wealthy woman, as revealed by the bequests and legacies set out in her will. Anne left all of her household goods, furniture, plate and linens to her sister Mary; her clothes and jewellery to her niece Eleanor Dabbs (daughter of her sister Sarah); a gold watch to her...
nephew William Dabbs; and her mother’s gold watch to his brother John Dabbs. She also left cash legacies for her great-nephew John Barrett Fawsett and niece Mary Elizabeth Fawsett, and her god-daughter Agnes Susan Nedham; as well as money for her servant, Elizabeth Huges.

Anne Barratt was one of the last people to be buried in the graveyard at St Martin’s, which shut the following year. By the mid-19th century, the town’s burial grounds were overcrowded and considered a health hazard. The town council, enabled by the Leicester Burial Act in 1848, had opened Welford Road Cemetery in 1849 and subsequently prohibited interments in the town’s other churchyards and burial grounds which had all effectively shut by 1855.

**Photo 9. Anne Barratt’s memorial in St Dunstan’s Chapel in Leicester Cathedral. The memorials above hers are to her sister Elizabeth, and to her parents and her sister Jane.**

Images: ULAS

Today, we found Anne’s grave, unmarked by any gravestone, lost beneath the floor of the Old Song School since the 1930s. She is not forgotten, however. When the Cathedral reopens, visit St Dunstan’s Chapel and look at the memorials on the wall to the left of the altar. Anne’s is there, beneath memorials to her sister Elizabeth, and her parents and her sister Jane. Look behind you and you will also find a memorial to her brother Thomas on the opposite wall. A Leicester family, still remembered together in a place of worship which must have been so integral to their lives.

COMING SOON: A blog about coffins, an update on the life of John Wilson Ottey and a first look at what analysis of the skeletons will tell us about the people of Leicester.

**Mathew Morris MA ACIfA**

*Project Officer*

Archaeological Services (ULAS)

University of Leicester

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**16 January 2022**

**Decant and Storage Operation Completed**

This complex operation was carried out in the first two weeks of January, thanks to the hard work and support of the verger team and volunteers, together with a range of experts and specialist contractors.

Key elements of the operation included the following:

The assemblage of furniture known as the Archdeacon’s Court that was at the east end of the Great South Aisle has been relocated by Midland Stone Masonry to the Church of St Michael, Edmonsthorpe, under a loan agreement with The Churches Conservation Trust.
Helpful advice and assistance was provided by Philip Warren and colleagues from the Conservation and Collections Team at Leicestershire County Council, with packing and storage of fragile and precious items, including altar frontals, banners and memorial books.

Colonel Anthony Swallow Ret. from the Royal Leicestershire Regiment supervised the safe removal of the regimental standards from St George's Chapel. The Regiment are arranging for skilled and sensitive cleaning and stabilisation work on the standards, finials and poles, and will safely store them during building works.

The Richard III Funeral Pall and Crown display cabinet has been moved by AM System Ltd to the King Richard III Visitor Centre and installed close to the King’s original burial site, alongside a short video display of the tomb.

AM System also took down the two large wall paintings in the north transept and securely packed them for onsite storage.

Local firm Stokes Removals managed the decant and storage of loose furniture, fittings and other items.

The Cathedral Organ has been fully covered by specialist firm Harrison & Harrison to protect it from dust and debris during building works.

With the Cathedral now clear, main contractor Messenger are undertaking general surveys, temporary removal of timber wall panels and the screen to St George’s Chapel, and comprehensive protection works to memorials and key features.

The next stage is professional asbestos removal from heating ducts and other identified areas.

Simon Bentley
Project Director for Leicester Cathedral Revealed
simon.bentley@leicestercofe.org