

IN SEARCH OF GREYFRIARS:

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The following article, outlining the process of doing research on the World Wide Web, was previously published in the May, 1999 edition of the Ohio Chapter's Crown & Helm, regional quarterly to which the author, David L. Treybig, Ph.D, makes regular contributions and for which he serves as assistant editor. Mr. Treybig's article on Greyfriar's location, as he was able to ascertain due to his extensive legwork on the Internet, appeared in the Spring, 1999 issue of the Ricardian Register.

Years ago I believe it was Judie Gall who in casual conversation informed this then novice Ricardian of the controversy about the final disposition of the earthly remains of Richard III. At that point, I had heard that his bones had been thrown into the River Soar, but had heard of no controversy about it. I just assumed they were there. Or that they had been thrown there. Perhaps not? Then where?

A year or two passed, and I wrote a whimsical piece for the Crown & Helm in which I speculated that if Richard's bones had been thrown into the River Soar, a variety of biochemical and hydro-sedimentary processes would have dissolved them by now. But what if they hadn't been thrown into the Soar? Where might they be and why?

Greyfriars Cemetery, perhaps. I speculated that surely the politically savvy Greyfriar monks, being demanded the remains of Richard III, might have delivered "some bones" to be thrown into the Soar, but surely they would not have given up the bones of Richard III, the last of the Plantagenet kings of England. Perhaps those bones remained in the Greyfriars Cemetery.

But where was Greyfriars? Even if Richard III's remains were no longer there — although I suspected that they were — it was worth knowing the location of Greyfriars because it was a significant part of Richard's story.

The History of Greyfriars

When I began this research in earnest, and even at this moment, the local municipal library's modest holdings could be of very little help. But there was the Internet, and I have some productive skill at using search engines, those helpful little 'robots' that search cyberspace for words and phrases that are of interest. So I began, armed with no books at all, but only my COMPAQ "Presario" 4528 computer, access to the Internet, and knowledge of

how to search for information on the Internet using four powerful multi-search engines.

When these search engines are evoked, one simply enters a word, a phrase, or a simple interrogatory sentence (example: "Where are maps of Leicester?" or "Franciscans") and a variety of possible sources for an answer come spilling out of the search engine, any one of which might be selected as a likely place to look for more complete information. The search engines I used were Omnitree (<http://www.omnitree.com>), Ask Jeeves (<http://www.askjeves.com>) and Webseeker (available from <http://www.bluesquirrel.com>).

I began with the obvious: the words "Greyfriars", "Greyfriars monastery", "Greyfriars church," and "Greyfriars cemetery" were put into the query box of search engines such as WebFerret, Omnitree, Ask Jeeves, and WebSeeker. Results were frustrating, because the first results were such as "Greyfriars Drama Group", "Greyfriars Lace Club", Greyfriars Coffee and Tea Company" and the like. And these groups had a wide variety of locations.

Narrowing the search by including the qualifier or filter "Leicester" produced results that were not more helpful, producing results such as: Greyfriars Realty in Surrey, Greyfriars Presbyterian Church in Auckland, and "What Concerts will be coming to the UK City of Leicester."

Abandoning that as non-productive, I searched for results using the place name, "Leicester, England." That opened up some possibilities. Not, however, the ones initially expected.

I speculated that the City of Leicester would have a great deal of material about Richard III. Wrong. There was wonderful information about where to skateboard, eateries, which places were safe at night and which were not, and a wide variety of civic information. On only one web site was I able to find mention of Richard III, and that was a page devoted to the Garden and Richard's statue there. About Greyfriars — nothing.

There being no Greyfriars sites, I decided to send an inquiring e-mail to an appropriate person at the college or university affiliated with a religious order. The web site I selected was that of the College of St. Benedict (for women) and St. John's University, this school being located in Central Minnesota. It was my hope that an e-mail to the reference librarian there might bring results. And, frankly, I have no shame in appending my Ph. D. after my name if it might bring

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about a more willing, complete response based on professional courtesy — small favors extended to other members of the academic community.

“But we are Benedictines . . .” the reply began, and continued “Greyfriars in the Middle Ages were Franciscans. There are numerous branches of Franciscans and they are well represented in Cyberspace.” I replied to the research librarian (and holder of the evocative title “Monastic Webweaver” at the university) that I was aware of his and his institutions Benedictine affiliation, but it was nevertheless my hope that Benedictines might be able to provide some information about the Greyfriars. (Frankly, I was hoping to interject some inter-religious order rivalry toward some productive end.) He said he’d see what he could find.

Then, in a series of e-mails from the Monastic Webweaver, I was sent titles of helpful books about the Franciscan experience in medieval England.

- *Medieval Religious Houses, England and Wales*, by David Knowles and R. Neville Hadock. Publisher: New York, St. Martin’s Press (1972, c. 1971)
- *Franciscan History and Legend in English Mediæval Art*, edited by A.G. Little, Publisher: (Manchester) Manchester University Press, 1937.
- *The Franciscans in England, 1224-1538*, by Francis Brogia Steck, O.F.M., Publisher: Chicago, IL, Franciscan Herald Press (c. 1920).

And along with the titles and bibliographic information a scan of pertinent paragraphs from each book! After my initial profuse thanks for his efforts, there followed a few clarifying e-mails between us, and these cleared a few remaining questions about Franciscan medieval church history in England.

- During this period I posed to the Richard III Society online discussion group my question of the whereabouts of Greyfriars, and I received some answers that gave me a rough indication of *where* it was located: under the parking lot of Woolworths, by the NatWest or National Westminster Bank, and by or on Greyfriars Lane. Suggestive and helpful, but I wanted to know *exactly* where all of Greyfriars was located, not just where to find a segment of Greyfriars wall or plaques commemorating Greyfriars nearby location.

Locating Maps of Greyfriars

However, the City of Leicester web site is “managed” from the University of Leicester. It occurred to me that perhaps the University of Leicester had an academic department that could help me in my search. I reviewed the University’s departments and concluded that the Department of Geography might be the likeliest

candidate, because in examining its web site, the department had a “maps” section and — even more intriguing — a maps department “Chief Technician.”

I wrote an e-mail to the Chief Technician, and explained my specific interest in finding the outline or perimeter of Greyfriars, so that I might get an idea of what properties would be on that same land on a map of present-day Leicester. I told him of the mixed and confused results from my other inquiries. To my delight he sent an e-mail reply in which he indicated that he thoroughly understood my research question and said he would be sending some maps and other materials to me that “might prove more helpful.” From his phrasing, I could tell that he understood my frustration, that he was writing “tongue-in-cheek” and that what he was sending might prove immensely helpful.

While these maps and other materials were being air mailed to me, I was not indolent in my quest, but continued to search.

Using a search engine, I came across a site indicating the organizational structure of the Anglican Diocese of Leicester. I examined the organization chart for a person or office that might have interest, knowledge, or access to materials relating to old Greyfriars. Since I have neither shyness nor shame in pursuit of these Ricardian research issues, I wrote an e-mail to the Secretary of the Bishop of Leicester, inquiring.

The bishop’s Secretary replied that perhaps the best help to be offered would be the name, address, and telephone number of the person in the diocese she thought to be most knowledgeable about the subject of Greyfriars; a person who had, in fact, written several articles on medieval history, including at least one on the subject of Greyfriars.

I therefore telephoned him, being careful to be mindful of the time differences between Texas and Leicester. After two “wrong numbers” (the bishop’s Secretary had given me the correct name and address, but wrong number), and a correct number “look up” by the person whose number I phoned twice in error, the telephone was answered by a very pleasant fellow who was astonished that I had phoned him from Texas, USA, but who was in fact the person I was trying to reach. We had a productive conversation, at the end of which he promised to send some materials that would be helpful.

The postman delivered the awaited large envelope from the Department of Geography at the University of Leicester. It contained a treasure trove of maps and documents.

- “Leicester at Domesday”, a photocopied page from “Part III, *Leicester and Rutland in the Late Eleventh Century*,” with approximately 80% of the page

given over to a drawn map of Leicester at the time of Domesday.

- A photocopied page of "Mendicant Orders," including Dominicans, Franciscans (or Grey Friars), Carmelites, the Austin Friars or Hermit Friars of St. Augustine, and the Crutched Friars.
- "Leicester and its regions," edited by N. Pye, Professor of Geography, University of Leicester, pp. 271-274, 1972. A brief economic and social history development of Leicester from 1066-1835, and including a one-page map of medieval Leicester.
- A 2-page photocopy from "Street Names of Leicester," by J.D. Bennett, part of the collection of the Map Library of the Department of Geography, University of Leicester, but a publication of Leicestershire Museums, Art Galleries and Records Service.
- * • A map of Leicester dated 1610 "Performed by John Speede, ...to be sold in Popes Head Alley by John Sudbury and George Humble anno 1610..."
- * • A map of Leicester dated approximately 1610, by Pierre van den Aa
- From "Leicester Through the Ages," all of Chapter 4: The Last Plantagenets (including a map of Leicester) and part of Chapter 5: Reformation, including a map of Leicester by Pierre van den Aa (1659-1733).
- A highly detailed map, 1839, building by building, major buildings named, but including all street names.
- A highly detailed map, 1930, building by building, major buildings named, but including all street names.
- A highly detailed map, 1955, building by building, major buildings named, but including all street names.
- A highly detailed map, 1968, building by building, major buildings named, but including all street names.
- A highly detailed map, building by building, including business and building names, of Leicester, dated February, 1993.
- A map of Greater Leicester today.
- A map of Leicester City Centre today.

And, along with the maps, a cautionary note in the margin of one of the maps that the map is suspect as regards its location of Greyfriars. After several

e-mails, it was determined that this map's location of Greyfriars monastery is correct after all.

Then I discovered that there was a Greyfriars unit at Oxford University, and an associated web site. I was interested to discover that this unit has the status of a Permanent Private Hall. Permanent Private Halls are not affiliated with the University as full colleges, and are often founded with a religious basis. However, students have access to University facilities, and study for the same degrees at:

- Blackfriars
- Campion Hall
- Greyfriars
- Manchester
- Regent's Park
- St. Benet's Hall

It, therefore, seemed reasonable to me to send an e-mail to a notable academic source at Oxford, expressing my interest in medieval Greyfriars information. He sent a return e-mail indicating his interest but expressing little hope that they could send me any information, and saying that he would refer my query to one of the faculty specializing in medieval church history. I subsequently received an en-mail from this person, saying:

"Re-your inquiry. You should begin with the Leicestershire Records Office, whose address is Long Street, Wigston Magna, Leics, LE18 2AH England. Phone: (44)-116-257-1120. They do not have e-mail available for external use."

This is the type reply that will frustrate research conducted primarily on the Internet. Persistence and ingenuity will win out in the long-run. And I was buoyed by recalling that I had already uncovered much information and that more would be forthcoming.

Analysis of the Information

Map image enhancement

The first thing I did was to face the fact that the medieval maps were difficult to read, due not only to the medieval writing, but also due both to the aging of the maps and to some loss of quality during the photocopying process. Also, some of the important information seemed too small for normal vision.

An Acer scanner was used to scan all of the maps so the images could be manipulated, thus improving them. They were scanned at high resolution and high quality. Initially saved as Windows bitmap files, they were also subsequently changed to "tif" files,

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preferred by some publishers. The files were saved in two adjacent folders. When the images were enhanced, they were saved as both Windows bitmap files and as "tif" files.

Enhancing the images was done with PaintShop Pro, software with strong image manipulation capabilities. The maps were first sharpened by one step. Each map was then "cleaned" by manually removing bits, flecks, smudges that seemed to be foreign to the original document, to enhance clarity and legibility. For some map images, both lightness/darkness and image density were changed to improve image clarity.

Map image manipulation

One advantage to computerized scanning and viewing of medieval maps is the potential to magnify images. This is a simple process, and serves the same purposes as using a very flexible magnifying glass, with different levels of magnification. This makes it possible to examine very small details and thus discern street names, map objects, and discover details not otherwise observable. Magnified map details can then be saved as new files, leaving untouched the image from which they were extracted.

Comparison of maps from various periods in Leicester's urban development

Viewing the maps one at a time, trying to find Greyfriars, was initially frustrating. Especially on the most recent maps, Leicester is such a large city and sufficiently developed that detailed maps tended to overload my perceptual process with too much detail. In recent maps, every city lot, every parcel of land, every house and business is noted. Every street, alley, bus stop, and dustbin. The task of examining maps individually and comparing a map with other maps seemed daunting. The maps were drawn just differently enough to make such comparisons very difficult.

The solution I chose was to look for the earliest map of Leicester on which I could find Greyfriars clearly indicated, and then memorize visually "the way it looked" in terms of its general shape and surrounding neighborhood. Then, with that image burned into my mind, I examined more recent maps looking for the shape of Greyfriars: and Irish harp.

The Irish Harp

The two earliest maps I examined both had the Greyfriars area clearly marked. They were extremely similar in this regard and were very similar maps generally. Indeed, one map seems to have been the original of these two maps (John Sharpe's), while the other (Pierre van den Aa's) seems to be a slightly redecorated and ornamented copy of the first. My earlier concern about the map mislabeling Greyfriars was resolved when I realized the maps technician at the University of Leicester had been warning about the

mislabeling of Greyfriars *Street*, not about the mislabeling of Greyfriars monastery property, though this was unclear from his cautionary note written in the map margin.

There it was, clearly indicated: an area in northeast Leicester, and shaped like an Irish harp, positioned as it would be if the player was on the harp's left, and facing right. Definite, and unmistakably labeled: Greyfriars, and complete with indications of approximately fifteen houses around the west, south, and east perimeters, with indeterminate land use on the north perimeter, and a larger central unit in the center of the parcel, which I took to be the monastery because it appears to have a steeple as part of the building. To its west, a road running north/south, and then a small field or meadow containing four trees, and to the west of the meadow, the Stoure (River Soar).

Identification of successive maps

Could Greyfriars be located in successive maps? Its shape seemed distinctive. Even if the later maps were highly detailed and had a slightly different perspective, perhaps Greyfriars could be identified, even if not labeled.

Examination of the 1741 map revealed the by now familiar Irish harp shape of the Greyfriars site, about the size of a city block or a little more, clearly delineated, with the addition of housing along the northern perimeter. On this map, Greyfriars occupies approximately 60-65% of the property, the remainder used for other purposes, mainly resident "row" houses.

The 1889 map of Leicester clearly indicated Greyfriars in its by now easily identifiable shape, and in Leicester's civic and political unit until noted as the First Ward. The area that seems undeniably Greyfriars is now located on the central eastern perimeter of the property, and seems no more than 20% of the area earlier identified as Greyfriars.

The 1930 map exhibits more intensive, dense, and complex urban development, but little or no further incursion into the Greyfriars area noted in the previous map.

The 1955 map indicates all of the Greyfriars area to be then used for urban development purposes. A stylized cross indicates some monastic or ecclesiastical use. The words "Franciscan Friary (Site of)" are superimposed on the center of the area, and a specific section of the Southwest corner of the large car park is designated as a "Ruin".

The 1965 map shows twelve businesses or other similar usage being made of the property. Of these, four are banks. Perhaps 8-10% of the property, in two units in the approximate middle of the total property, is blank, indicating car parking or no current use.

The 1993 map, one of the two areas noted in the 1965 map has disappeared. One blank area — perhaps

Leicester
Promotions

5-6% of the total property known as Greyfriars — remains as a centrally located car park.

The 1995 map of Leicester City Centre, distributed by Leicester Promotions ("Leicester: a city of surprises") shows the areas as solid-colored, with no indication whatever of type of land use. There is no indication on this map, currently widely circulated, of any previous use by Greyfriars, or of its Ricardian associations.

The 1999 map for visitors to the University of Leicester and its environs likewise shows the area as solid color, with no indication of land use, Greyfriars, or Ricardian associations.

Small wonder, then, that so many visitors look for the site in vain for the whereabouts of Greyfriars. The two most commonly distributed present-day maps give no indication of it.

Street name changes and a "new street"

As I reviewed these maps, I have to confess I was initially confused because I would look for street names and find them no longer there, the name having been changed to something entirely different. Sometimes a street name was retained, but applied to a different street!

Fryer Lane (1741 map) became Grey Friars (1889 map). High Street (1741) became Friar Lane (1889). Cank Street (1741) became Southgate Street (1889 and subsequent maps).

Data analysis appeared complete and the writing was well underway and almost finished. With Grey Friars friary's location known, this research project was concluded.

Or was it?

An e-mail from Leicester...

An inquiry made much earlier in the research process bore belated fruit. An e-mail from Leicester arrived with the following information:

"The King's England: Leicestershire & Rutland (by Arthur Mee, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1937) is rather dated and cannot reflect recent historical or archaeological knowledge. However, Mee reports (p. 118) that "the Herricks came to Leicester in the 16th century, having acquired the grounds of the Grey Friars Priory, founded in the 14th century. It stood south of St. Martin's, and after the dissolution of the monasteries some of the material of the priory church was used to repair St. Martin's, to which the Herricks were always good friends". St. Martin's is of course the cathedral..."

Conclusions

At least the two following conclusions can be drawn from the foregoing:

1. Although the land previously occupied by Greyfriars has undergone change in land use, the site or location exists and can be located. The original roads around its perimeter have not changed their location, though some road name changes have occurred. The site previously occupied by Greyfriars is today bound by Friar Lane to the south, by Grey Friars to the east, by Peacock Lane to the north, and by New Street to the south. Taken together, these four streets enclose the property formerly known as the grounds of the Greyfriars church and cemetery.

2. Internet-based "serious" Ricardian research with primary historical sources is possible and can yield productive results. The Ricardian who cannot go to England to conduct research and whose local resources are not sufficient to the research question can, nevertheless, gain access to many required source materials by using the Internet. The Internet is a vast collection of information that can be productively used by the Ricardian who has Internet access (even if only at the local library or at the home of a cooperative friend). The main requirements for such research seem to be a well-phrased, researchable question, access to the Internet, knowledge of how to use the Internet or willingness to learn, a dash of ingenuity and creativity, tenacity, tolerance for frustrations, a sense of humor, and luck.

I must not close without mentioning a few intangible but valuable rewards of this kind of research. One makes new acquaintances, some of whom may become close acquaintances, or perhaps even friends. Opportunities present themselves to share with others one's Ricardian view of historical events, a wonderful way of sharing the Society's existence, resources, achievements, and future goals. Finally, perhaps, one may become aware of a community of shared interests, and in today's world any increased sense of community can lead to a surprising sense of satisfaction.



first internet search to locate greyfriars area