

'I knew it was him'

FINDING RICHARD III

A team of scientists reveal a king's gruesome death as a 500-year-old royal mystery is solved

Digging under a car park in Leicester, England, in September last year as part of a team of University of Leicester archeologists searching for the bones of one of the most famous figures in English history, Dr Jo Appleby never expected to strike historical gold. The team were convinced they were above the remains of the Grey Friars, a medieval monastery and church where it was believed King Richard III was buried, but Appleby, a lecturer in bioarchaeology, had no idea where on the site she was looking. "We were working within a religious building, so I knew it was very likely that we would find burials," Appleby, 32, tells Phil Boucher. "What I wasn't expecting was to find the right burial."

But on Feb. 5, the university announced that DNA testing had confirmed that a skeleton Appleby found during the dig was that of the 32-year-old king, who ruled England for two years before he was killed in the 1485 Battle of Bosworth, ending the dynasty of the Plantagenet family and enabling usurper Henry VII (a distant ancestor of Queen Elizabeth II) to take the throne. The dig came about through the backing of the Richard III Society's Philippa Langley, an English screenwriter who "had the strongest sensation that I was walking on Richard's grave" when she visited the car park in 2009. The historic find confirms the grisly details of how the king died in a battle in which it is believed he lost his helmet and horse—"My kingdom for a

horse!" wrote Shakespeare in *Richard III*. Here, Appleby tells Phil Boucher how she uncovered a lost king.

How did the dig come about? Philippa Langley approached the university and the city council about looking into the possibility of searching for Richard III's remains. There is a historical source that says after the Battle of Bosworth, Richard's body was taken to the church of the Grey Friars and buried there.

Had no-one looked there before? The friary disappeared in the 1530s and a lot of that area then became a private garden. Then over time the garden was lost and developed and eventually ended up as a council car park.

How confident were you of finding him? We weren't expecting to find him. The area of the Grey Friars is larger than the area covered by the car park—a lot of it is covered by external buildings. So we were only able to excavate a small area within the car park. The strategy was to put in three trenches that ran in a north to south direction, because we were looking for religious buildings and they tend to run east to west. That strategy really paid off. We were incredibly lucky.

How important is the discovery? Other than Henry VIII, King Richard is possibly the most famous king in English history. He is also one of the very few that does have physically recognisable characteristics. Shakespeare refers to him as a "hunchback." [It is believed *Richard III* had scoliosis, a spinal abnormality.]

"We were just incredibly lucky"
—archaeologist Dr Jo Appleby

What did it feel like to find him? It was very strange. When I came to excavate the spine and I realised that it had all the characteristics that we might look for, it became obvious that it was probably going to be him. I told a couple of people and then I carried on working. We had to make sure that he was fully excavated by the end of that working day, because you can't leave a skeleton in the ground overnight. We got off site around 7.30 PM then went back to the university to secure him for the night.

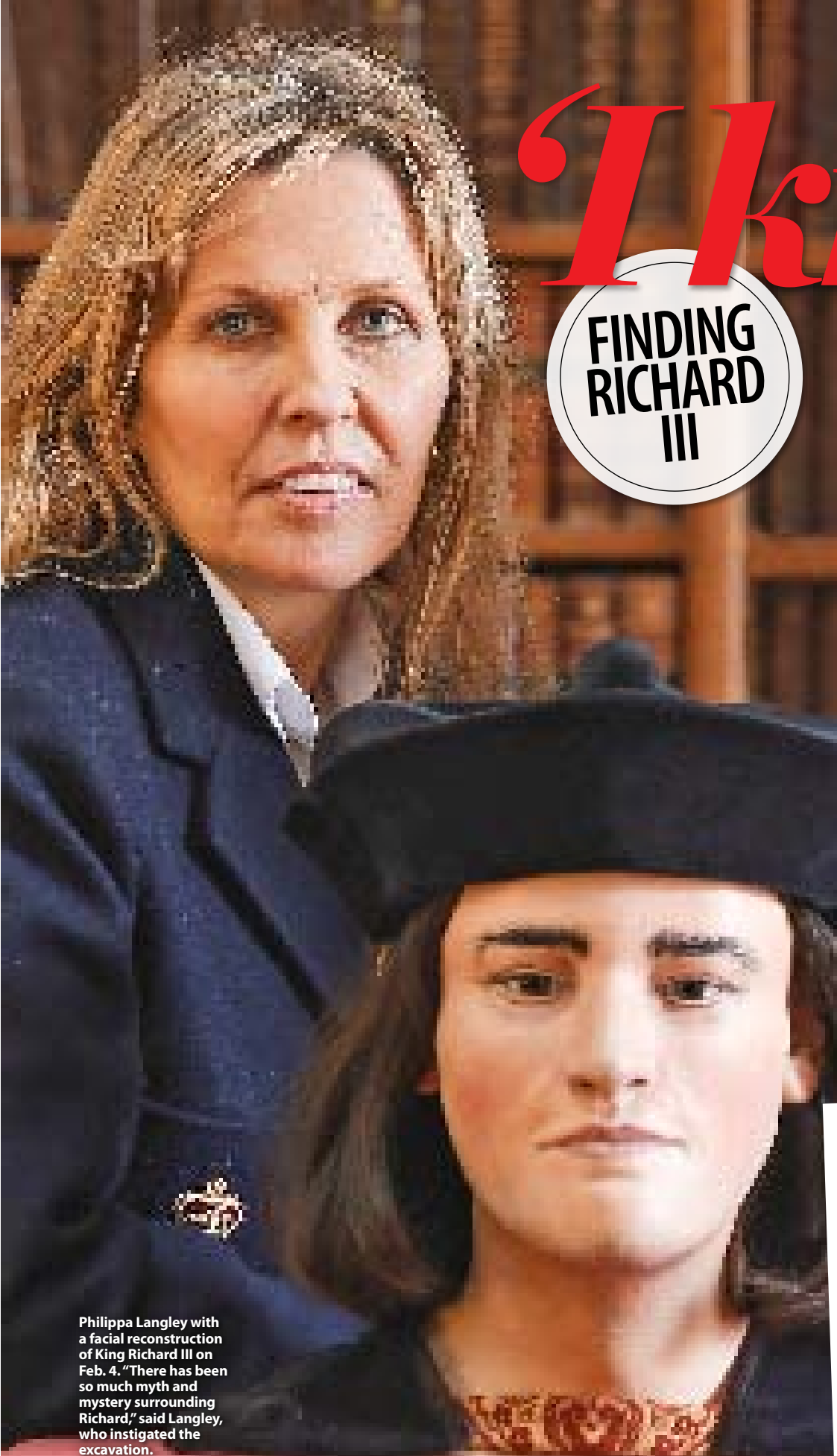
What have you learnt about his cause of death? We have evidence of 10 wounds on the body, of which eight are on the skull. We have two wounds at the base of the skull—one, a very large one, which was caused by some kind of very large bladed weapon. So something along the lines of a halberd [an axe-like weapon]. There is also a penetrating wound caused perhaps by the tip of a sword going into the skull. Both of those wounds would have caused quick loss of consciousness,

with death following shortly afterwards. The interesting thing is that those wounds could not have been inflicted on someone wearing a helmet. So he had lost his helmet, presumably in the thick of battle.

Was there post-mortem mutilation, as was common practice in those times? We can't prove that, but it is a suggestion because we do know that is the sort of thing that people do in that kind of situation. They will mutilate corpses, and particularly one that is the source of much dislike amongst its enemies. He certainly wasn't treated very well.

How did you find an ancestor to match Richard III's DNA? A historian called John Ashdown Hill has traced maternal-line ancestry to [Canadian carpenter] Michael Ibsen [a descendant of Richard's sister Anne], who is our modern-day DNA donor. We took DNA from Richard's teeth.

How does it feel to be a part of Richard III's history? I'm really not sure it has sunk in yet. I am still finding it a very strange thing. I had a glass of wine last night, I will admit. ■



Philippa Langley with a facial reconstruction of King Richard III on Feb. 4. "There has been so much myth and mystery surrounding Richard," said Langley, who instigated the excavation.



Richard III's skull revealed 10 wounds including "a mark on the lower jaw that was potentially caused by a dagger," says Appleby.

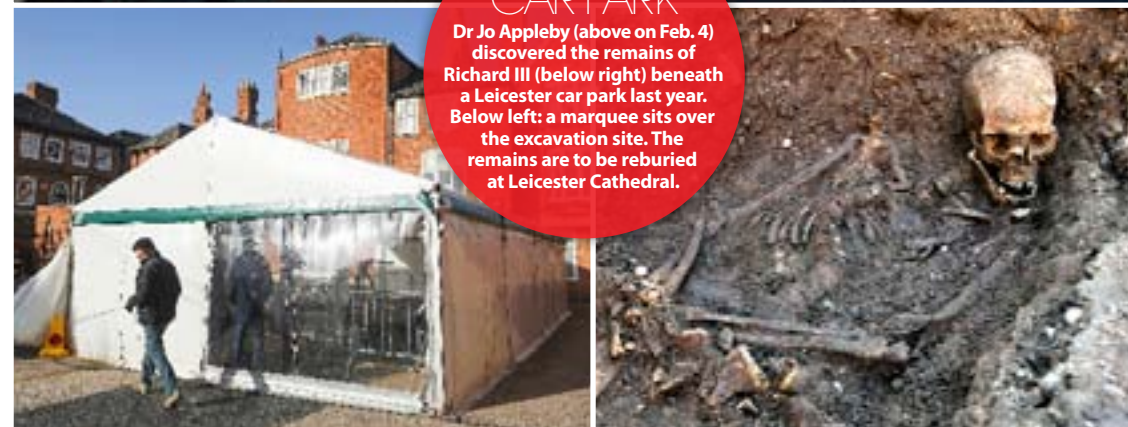


A portrait of Richard III.



KING IN A CAR PARK

Dr Jo Appleby (above on Feb. 4) discovered the remains of Richard III (below right) beneath a Leicester car park last year. Below left: a marquee sits over the excavation site. The remains are to be reburied at Leicester Cathedral.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: GETTY IMAGES (2); AAP; GETTY IMAGES (2); AAP