THE FRIENDS OF
JEWRY WALL MUSEUM

* ROMAN LEICESTER *

WALKING TRAIL

WELCOME TO ROMAN LEICESTER – RATAE CORIELTAVORUM

Archaeologists suspect that that a military garrison was established at Leicester soon after the Roman conquest of Britain in AD 43, probably on the site of an existing British settlement on the east bank of the River Soar.

In Roman times Leicester was known as Ratae Corieltavorum. Ratae comes from the Celtic word 'ratas', for the ramparts that we think protected the pre-Roman settlement. It was the tribal capital of the Corieltauvi people who controlled the surrounding territory, maybe as far as Lincoln.

Ratae developed throughout the Roman occupation of Britain and by the late 3rd Century AD was a successful walled town with trading links across Britain and Western Europe - the rectangular street grid featured important public buildings, ornate townhouses, shops, industrial sites and at least one temple.

This walking tour takes you through modern Leicester to the location of key Roman sites and buildings that have been lost and found (and sometimes lost again) - look out for our Heritage Panels as you go for more information about different periods in Leicester's history. The walk will take you near many other sites of interest including the medieval suburb of The Newarke, Newarke Houses Museum, The Guildhall and Leicester Cathedral – final resting place of King Richard III.

The walking trail should take between an hour and 90 minutes to complete, at a moderate pace. We hope that exploring Leicester's busy, multi-cultural streets gives you a flavour of the bustling, diverse Roman city that once thrived here.

Peacock mosaic, discovered in St. Nicholas Street, 1898.

Excavations at the Stibbe Site.

Artist's impression of Roman Leicester looking south-west.
Mike Codd: University of Leicester Archaeological Services

Leicester's heritage panels help people to explore the city's varied history.

THE MAIN SITES

1 JEWRY WALL & BATH SITE

This is the start and finish point for your walking tour. The original museum was opened in 1966 and was purpose-built to showcase the Jewry Wall bath site and to house objects found during the excavation.

The Council originally acquired the site planning to build a municipal baths. A bankrupt factory was demolished and an archaeologist employed to discover what had once been there - the site was excavated by Kathleen Kenyon and her team of council workers and volunteers between 1936 and 1939. Two metres of soil and thousands of tonnes of rubble were removed before the team reached Roman levels.

Originally described as a Roman basilica, it was only after further excavations in the 1960s and 70s that the true story of the Jewry Wall site was revealed. The baths would have been a major public building in Roman Leicester.

The name 'Jewry Wall' is thought to come from 'Jurat', a Saxon term for the town's jurors who met at St. Nicholas Church.

2 ST. NICHOLAS CHURCH

St. Nicholas is probably the oldest place of worship in Leicester with a history dating back to Leicester's Saxon period. Much of the church was built with re-used stone from the deserted bath site and you can see Roman tiles both inside the church and outside on the tower. There is Roman stonework in the churchyard, where you can see several columns - archaeologists think they may have been salvaged from the area around the Forum.

☛ *From St. Nicholas, follow the railings back past Jewry Wall towards the River Soar. Just after Bath Lane you'll be on the site of the West Gate.*

3 THE WEST GATE

A blue plaque marking the site of the West Gate can be found on the north side of the West Bridge, close to the junction with Bath Lane. The West Gate would have provided access to two Roman roads; the Fosse Way running south-west and probably another road to Mancetter on the modern A5 in Warwickshire.

Bath Lane follows the approximate line of the western city wall in the direction of another public bath house; more Roman archaeology is likely to be found in this part of the city in coming years.

☛ *From the blue plaque, use the crossing across the A47. Turn left following the railings and then turn right into Castle Street. Castle View will take you past St. Mary De Castro church, Leicester Castle and through the Turret Gateway to The Newarke. Walk left past Newarke Houses Museum until you see the Magazine Gateway facing you and DMU's Edith Murphy House on your left.*

4 THE SOUTH GATE

Current thinking is that the South Gate provided access through the town wall at a spot near where the Magazine Gateway now stands – there is a plaque marking the spot at the entrance to the nearby Edith Murphy House. The South Gate joined Leicester to two Roman roads, one leading to Tripontium in Warwickshire - near where the River Avon crosses Watling Street (A5) - and one to Godmanchester (Durovigitum), a key Roman crossroads in modern Cambridgeshire.

Archaeologists have found evidence of Roman graves to the east of modern Oxford Street (B) – in line with custom, Roman cemeteries were sited outside the town walls.

☛ *Cross over Southgates dual carriageway and turn left. Cross Peacock Lane into Applegate, which leads to Jubilee Square.*

5 THE FORUM & BASILICA

This site is now partially beneath Jubilee Square. Standing in the square looking north, you're facing the main pedestrian entrance to the Forum – take a minute to study the nearby heritage panel that shows the layout of Roman Leicester and the important buildings that would have dominated civic life.

The Forum was a large open square with colonnades on three sides containing shops. The fourth side was made up of the Basilica, the heart of the town's administration and judicial function. The entire complex would have covered an area of approx. 130 x 90 metres.

☛ *On the south of the square, you will see Wygston's House, now a bar and restaurant. Read the panel about medieval Leicester on the corner of Guildhall Lane.*

6 THE FOSSE WAY

The line of the Fosse Way through Leicester ran past the medieval Wygston's House, down Guildhall Lane and Silver Street and through Eastgate, near the modern Clock Tower at the heart of modern Leicester.

The Fosse Way, which would have been constructed in sections rather than as one road, linked Exeter (Isca) in the south-west to Lincoln (Lindum Colonia) in the north-east, crossing the River Soar at Leicester. Roman Leicester was an important crossroads, providing access to a shifting frontier.

☛ *Follow Guildhall Lane and Silver Street to Eastgates at the bottom of the modern High Street. The Clocktower will be in front of you.*

THE MAIN SITES

7 THE EAST GATE

The Roman wall ran along the line of what are now Churchgate and Gallowtree Gate.
The East Gate gave access to the Fosse Way running north-east toward Lincoln, along the line of the modern Belgrave and Melton Roads. A rare Roman mile marker dedicated to the Emperor 'Caesar Trajanus Hadrianus Augustus' was discovered by the Melton Road near where Rushey Mead School now stands, reading 'Two miles to Ratae.

☛ *Turn back up High St. until you reach the junction of Highcross Street where you should turn right.*

8 THE MACELLUM

Leicester's Roman market was built north of the Forum in the early 3rd century AD.
Its eastern wall would have run down the middle of Highcross Street and would have been at least 16 metres in height. The Macellum stood on the site of an earlier Roman building known as the Blue Boar Lane townhouse, discovered in the late 1950s and now partially covered by Vaughan Way.

☛ *When you reach Vaughan Way, turn to the right and walk towards Causeway Lane. Sites 9 and 10 are located on the opposite side of the road.*

9 THE STIBBE SITE

On this former factory site, Roman roads, wells, at least two townhouses and possibly part of a small theatre have been found in recent years. The remains of a high quality mosaic was also found, as well as a bronze handle showing a lion attacking a man standing on four other figures. These discoveries help us understand how important Leicester was during the Roman period and that is was a vibrant city with long distance connections with the rest of the Empire

10 VINE STREET COURTYARD HOUSE

Beneath what is now the John Lewis multi-storey car park stood a palatial private dwelling with at least 26 rooms, some with underfloor heating. Excavations of the site have revealed 'how the other half lived' in Roman Leicester with access to imported fruit, sea fish and oysters served in high quality glass and pottery dishes in ornately decorated rooms by numerous servants and slaves.

☛ *Use the crossing at Causeway Lane and then turn right down Vaughan Way and then left down Burgess Street. A quick detour into Junior Street will take you to an information board detailing the excavation of part of the Roman wall (see below). Continue down Burgess Street and then left into Long Lane and Cumberland Street, along the line of the Roman wall.*

11 THE NORTH GATE AND ROMAN WALL

The North Gate stood at the end of Highcross Street, near the junction of modern Sanvey Gate and Soar Lane. The road from here northwards could have connected Leicester with outlying areas used by the town to source stone and slate used in buildings like the baths at Jewry Wall and the Vine St townhouse.

Excavations near this spot, where Burgess House now stands, revealed a section of the town wall, 3 metres wide and up to 5 metres tall, which probably stood on existing ramparts, with two ditches providing extra security. Also discovered was the foundation of an interval tower that would have abutted the town wall and might have provided a platform for a defensive weapon like a crossbow (ballista).

☛ *Return towards Jewry Wall using Great Central Street, past Leicester's original Victorian train station.*

SITES FURTHER AFIELD

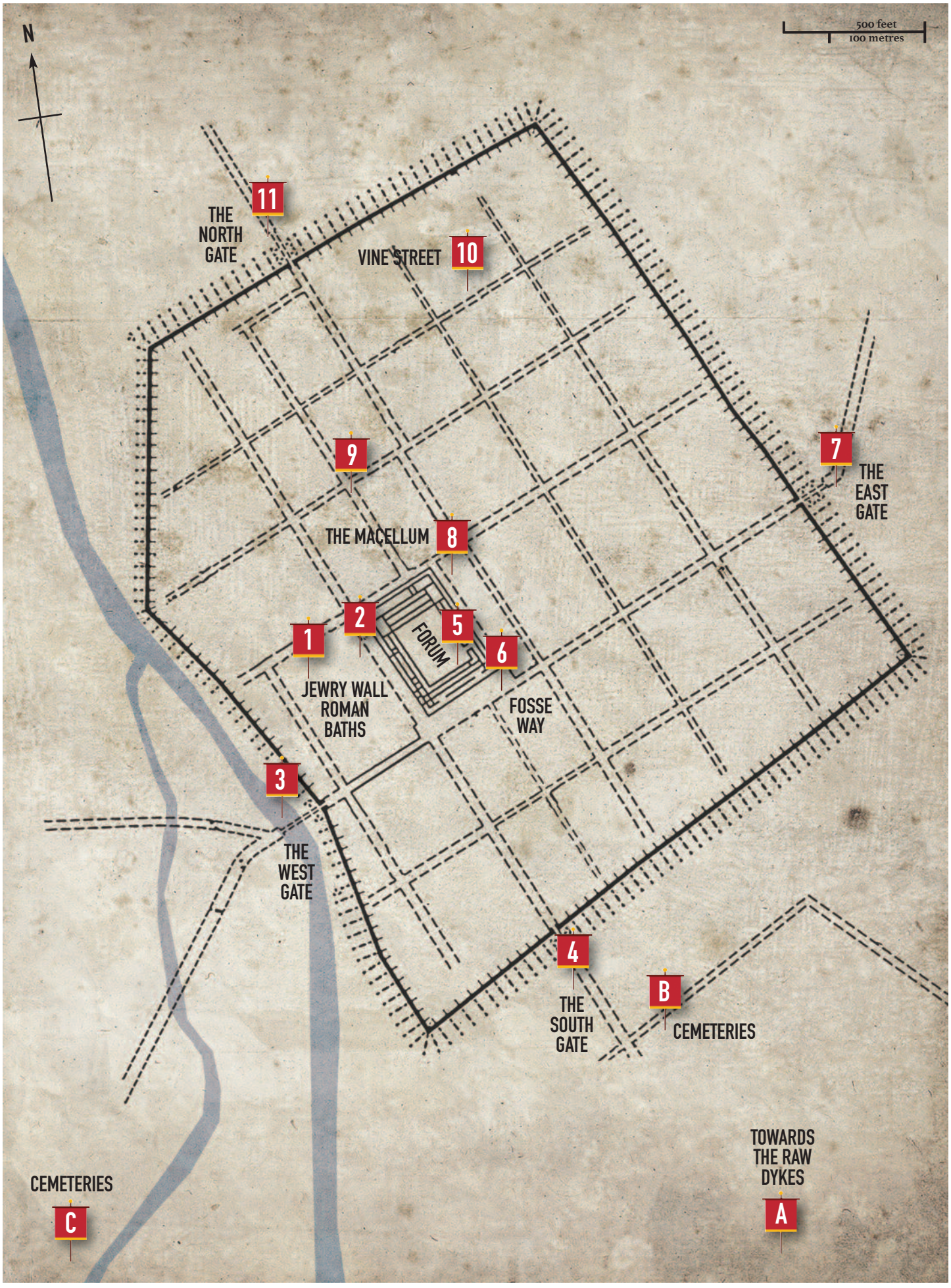
A THE RAW DYKES

A surviving section of what's thought to be Leicester's Roman aqueduct can be seen at The Raw Dykes, near Leicester's King Power Stadium. The nearby Knighton Brook would have supplied the aqueduct with clean water which was then transported over 2km to the Roman city in a clay-bottomed channel. Ditches running alongside the aqueduct protected it from flooding.

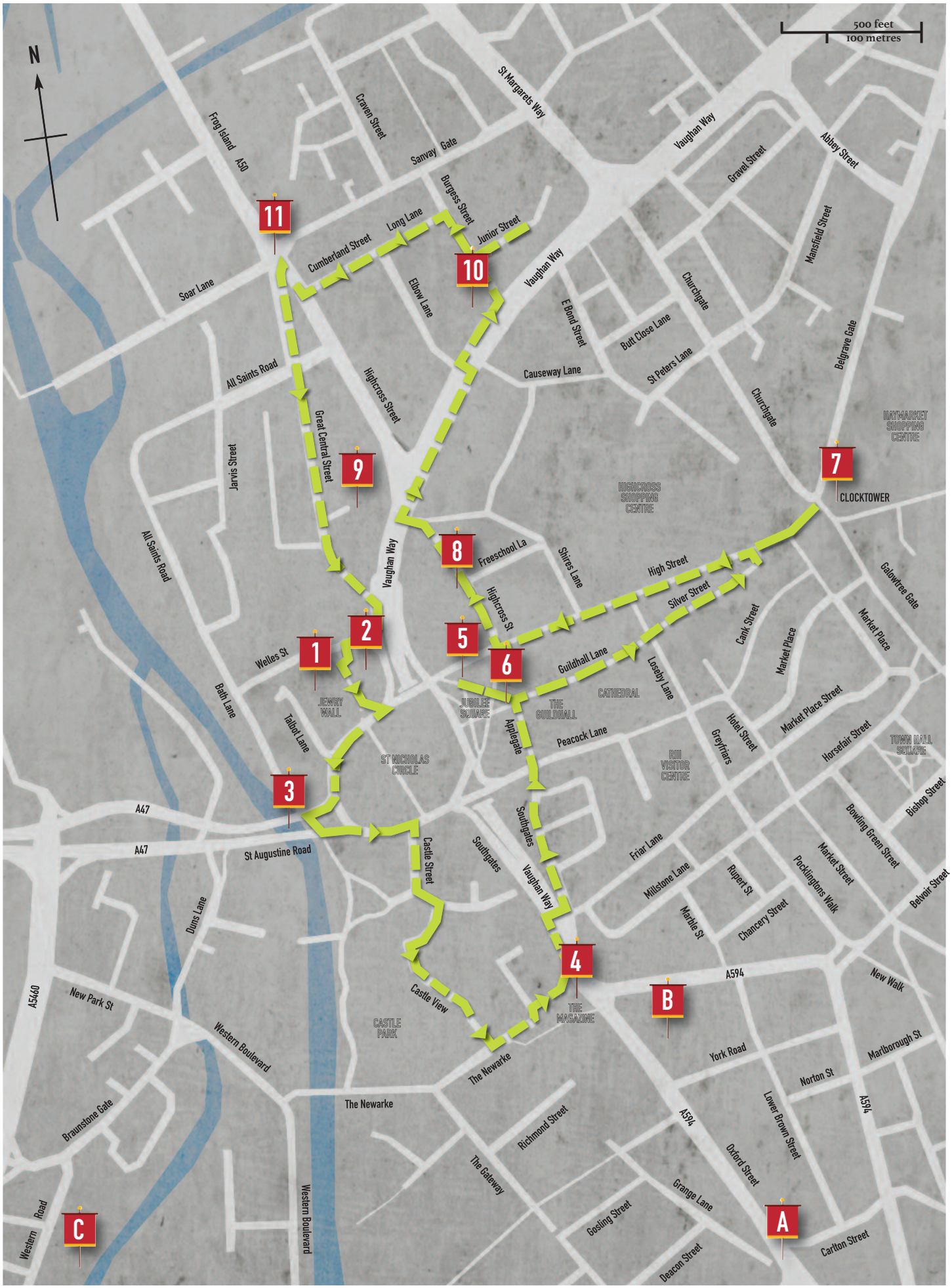
B & C ROMAN CEMETERIES

Burial sites have been discovered outside Leicester's walls. The earliest found so far stretched for 200m beside the Fosse Way (C) and would also have been visible from river traffic. Excavations have uncovered grave goods like bangles, bracelets and hairpins in about 50% of burials, as well as DNA pointing to a diverse Leicester population at the time. One older adult body had been decapitated, with the head buried between the legs; whether this was a result of punishment or religious ritual is unclear.

PLAN OF THE ROMAN TOWN



MAP OF MODERN LEICESTER



JEWRY WALL – AN ADVENTURE IN TIME

The Friends of Jewry Wall have developed an app aimed at young people that can be downloaded from Google Play and the App Store. The app features games, graphics and activities to tell the story of how the Jewry Wall baths were built and used in Roman Leicester.

For more background about the history of the bath site please visit our mobile website: **jewrywallstory.leicester.gov.uk**

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