

Ancient human remains found under the new tram route on Constitution Street

The excavation of human remains which date back about half a millennium has begun on Constitution Street, as part of the Trams to Newhaven project.

Archaeologists are back on site outside South Leith Parish Church, where previous investigations in 2008 showed that in the medieval period the church's graveyard extended across the road with graves surviving beneath the current road surface.



A member of the team of archaeologists working in Constitution Street 16 July 2020 PHOTO ©2020 The Edinburgh Reporter



Nacho Di Bicente excavating another set of human remains in Constitution Street during the second phase of tramworks 16 July 2020 PHOTO ©2020 The Edinburgh Reporter

The team are removing any human remains that are likely to be affected by the tram works, and have so far exhumed more than ten bodies, dating from between 1300 and 1650. City Archeologist, John Lawson told us he expects to find around 150 to 200 graves here.



Katherine Warden with one of the sets of remains found in Constitution Street PHOTO ©2020 The Edinburgh Reporter

After the excavation the remains will be subject to forensic examination and analysis that will reveal information on the health, diseases and diet of the people of medieval Leith. As

John said everything they find is for the public benefit, and will be recorded.



He explained: "The historic port and town of Leith is one of

the Scotland's most significant urban archaeological sites with evidence of occupation going back over 900 years.

“Although only just started, the excavations by our team from GUARD have already provided important new evidence regarding the history of the graveyard and earlier town with the discovery of what we believe are the remains of its original medieval graveyard wall. It is hoped that further new discoveries will be made and that we will learn important new evidence for the lives of Leith's medieval inhabitants so that we can tell their story to modern Leithers.”

Down in Leith archaeologists have unearthed remains around 500 years old. The excavations will go on until at least September. pic.twitter.com/QqJmVLap3L

– Edinburgh Reporter (@EdinReporter) [July 16, 2020](#)



Excavations will go on here until at least September *PHOTO*
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Depute Leader Cammy Day said: “This is an extremely fascinating, essential part of the broader project to bring the tram to Newhaven, shedding some light on centuries of history here in Leith.

“It's crucial that we conserve the remains found here, and a team of archaeologists are carrying out the painstaking job of doing this. What's more, further examination of the excavated graves will give us an invaluable glimpse into the lives of Leithers past.”



A member of the team of archaeologists working in Constitution Street 16 July 2020 *PHOTO* ©2020 The Edinburgh Reporter

During the first phase, the team took down part of a wall surrounding Constitution Street Graveyard, dating back to

1790, ahead of excavation of the historic graveyard. Preparatory work led archaeologists to discover what appears to be a large charnel pit which may contain the remains of some burials recovered from the laying of 19th century services in Constitution Street.

The main construction works on Leith Walk from Elm Row to Crown Place are currently underway, with traffic management involving Leith Walk being reduced to one city bound lane between London Road and Crown Place for the duration of the works.

All works, including archaeological investigations, are being carried out while maintaining physical distancing and with additional measures to protect workers' and the public's health in place.

Find out more about [Trams to Newhaven](#) on the project website.