

THE POST HOLE

Issue 24

Star Carr

In the words of
Professor
Nicky Milner



Also in this issue:

The excavation of burial mounds in Shestovitsa, Ukraine

On the edge of the Moors: digging Boltby Scar hillfort

Acknowledgements

The Post Hole is grateful to the University of York's Department of Archaeology for essential financial and collaborative support, which has greatly assisted the running and growth of the student-run archaeology journal since its establishment in 2008.



The Post Hole is also grateful to Heritage Technology for professionally redeveloping its website in 2012, and continuing to provide technical support since then.



Finally, *The Post Hole* wishes to thank University of York students Taryk Rawlins-Welburn and Laura Harker for their superb design of the front and back covers of this issue.

Front cover: Professor Nicky Milner holding a barbed point at Star Carr (Image Copyright: Nicky Milner)



Birch tree excavated at Star Carr in 1950 (Reproduced with kind permission of the Vale of Pickering Research Trust)

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Editorial: a brand new year, a brand new Post Hole

For many archaeologists, October is a month of change, a chance for reflection and progression. The summer is over, and whilst we look fondly back at sunny (and not so sunny) days excavating, surveying and perhaps relaxing, we also look to the future at the challenges and opportunities ahead of us, whether that's the start of another term at university, the return to the office, or less archaeological pursuits.

October also marks a change for *The Post Hole*. Last week was the fourth anniversary of its first issue, and my fellow editors and I have spent much of the summer working hard to prepare for a very different fifth year of the journal...

This week sees the exciting **relaunch of our website** which we hope will make *The Post Hole* an even more dynamic and interactive experience for our readers. Our new **Facebook**, **Twitter** and **Google+** pages are now integrated with our website to ensure you remain up to date with the latest news and features from us. We hope that you like the changes we've made to *The Post Hole* website and we welcome any suggestions from you for further improvements.

Another substantial change for *The Post Hole* is the increased availability of our hard copies of issues. We realise that many people prefer to read hard copies of our issues, so to complement the developments in our online presence, we are now printing copies of our issues for archaeology students and staff of the **Universities of Durham, Oxford and Sheffield**, and hopefully others in the near future. We also now have copies of our issues for staff and visitors of the **Council for British Archaeology** and **York Archaeological Trust** which are both based in the City of York, our hometown.

We have a lot of other exciting initiatives planned for you over the course of the coming year. We will keep you informed of those via our website and social media pages.

For now, I hope you will enjoy reading this new issue of *The Post Hole*. Its content is similarly reflective with articles looking back on this summer's University of York archaeology field school at **Boltby Scar hillfort**, a community fieldwork project in the Yorkshire village of **North Duffield**, and if you're a student, useful **advice** from York archaeology graduates concerning their experiences of undergraduate life.

Our **special feature** this month is an interview with director of the Star Carr Project, Professor Nicky Milner. We spoke to her shortly before she went to excavate at the nearby Mesolithic site of Flixton Island this summer. Features about her latest excavation will appear in a future issue, but for now we hope this interview offers you a tantalising look into her research and thoughts about the site she is becoming synonymous with.

Enjoy!

David Altoft (Editor-in-Chief of *The Post Hole* - david.altoft@theposthole.org)

Star Carr, in the words of Professor Nicky Milner

David Altoft (david.altoft@theposthole.org)

Professor Milner is a Mesolithic Archaeologist based at the University of York. We interviewed her earlier this year to find out about the home of Britain's oldest known 'house', Star Carr; a site she has excavated at for over 15 years...

What first interested you in becoming an archaeologist and why did you decide to specialise in Mesolithic archaeology?

I was always interested in archaeology as a child, and one of the things that really inspired me was when I went to the Jorvik Centre when I was about eight - there was a wall of pottery and I thought that it was really amazing that you were actually allowed to touch it... later, when I was sixteen I went on a dig with Dominic Powlesland as part of the Duke of Edinburgh's residential scheme - I went for five days and ended up spending six weeks there. So that's what got me into archaeology. What got me into the Mesolithic was being taught by Roger Jacobi at Nottingham University who was very inspiring and knew so much about the period. I was particularly interested in Star Carr because it was not far from where I lived.

Do you think that the Mesolithic period is overshadowed by its neighbours, the Palaeolithic and the Neolithic, and if so, what is your opinion about this?

I think it has and I think the reasons for that are people have tended to focus on flint and not thought how to make the period particularly interesting. It also lacks the cave art and monuments you get in the other two periods. But everything is changing and a lot of people are interested in the Mesolithic now. For instance, in Europe at the last Mesolithic conference there were over 400 people, all working on things that can make it more interesting, like ritual, burial, subsistence and consumption practices.

As you say, there does seem to be a growing awareness of the Mesolithic in recent years, and Star Carr has certainly played a central role in this. What do you think are the most effective ways of engaging the public with this part of the past?

For the Star Carr Project I've given a lot of talks to local societies in the last few years and people seem to be really engaged and interested in it; they haven't really heard much about it before. But what we're very aware of is that we're not really reaching groups other than local societies who may already have an interest in history or the local environment, and what we're really planning is engaging children in the period; particularly because in Denmark, the Mesolithic is seen as their 'Golden Age' and they teach it in schools and the children play bows and arrows and Stone Age hunters. We've got a project at the moment

being developed by Emily Hellewell with a number of students, trying to work out activities which can be used by the Young Archaeologist's Club, but we're always looking for new ideas so if anybody wants to get involved or share their ideas, we're always open to suggestions.



A site tour of Star Carr during the 2010 season of excavation (Reproduced with kind permission of Nicky Milner)

Your discovery two years ago of possibly the oldest 'house' and evidence of carpentry in Britain has since attracted much greater coverage of Star Carr in the media. Do you think there have been any problems with the way that the press has presented Star Carr or the Mesolithic?

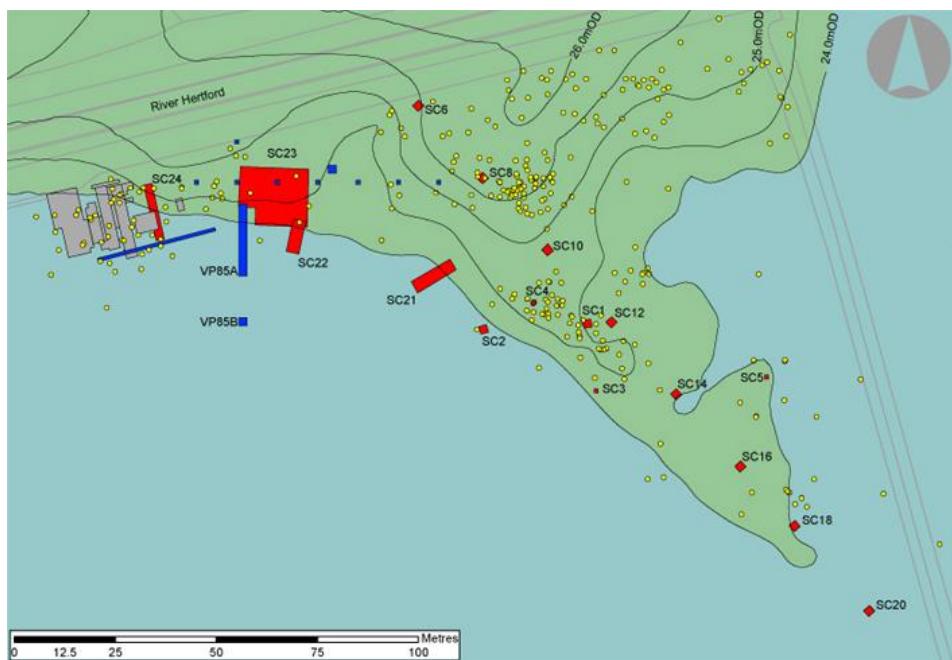
Well the press came out with some funny ideas – they talked about the timber platform as the earliest timber decking, and one newspaper referred to the structure as the “crappiest house in Britain”, which was quite rude! So there are things like that, but actually I don’t really have any problems with the way they portrayed it because they did a great service by getting lots of people interested, and it did go world-wide in terms of coverage. I think you have to accept that if you’re going to do press releases, people are sometimes going to write things like that but you also have to think of ways in which you’ll appeal to a wide audience.

You’re not the first person to have excavated at Star Carr. How has investigation of the site developed since it was discovered in 1947 and how and when did you become involved with it?

Well, the other major phase after Clark, was in 1985 – most people will know about it from the book by Paul Mellars and Petra Dark (1998) - but what they probably don’t know is that it was Paul Lane, here at York, who excavated it with Tim Schadla-Hall; and it was Paul Lane who realised that the wood was actually worked timber and so very important. I got involved because in 1996 I started working with the Vale of Pickering Research Trust, and Tim Schadla-Hall, and (together with Chantal Conneller and Barry Taylor) we discussed doing some more excavations at Star Carr because we thought there might be problems with deterioration.

One of the major developments in our understanding of the site is of its size. Grahame Clark stopped excavating after three years in 1951 because he believed he found the whole site. What has been found that makes you think the site is more complex than originally believed?

I think the key thing is we’ve broadened our area of survey; we did fieldwalking first of all, and then a lot of test pitting over the whole peninsula and found that there’s huge quantities of flint all over that whole area. We now think that Grahame Clark only excavated less than a 5th of what the overall area probably is, and may well be underestimating it. I think the reason why he got it wrong, (but you can completely understand his logic), is because he excavated an area and he showed there was a large concentration of flints in the middle that petered out around the edges, so it really did look like it was a total excavation. Also, he was comparing it with other sites in Europe and saying that all these other sites in Germany and Denmark were about that size and so it was seen to be typical of a Mesolithic site. We think the trouble is it’s been a self-fulfilling prophecy so we keep thinking Mesolithic sites will be small when they’re probably much larger, and it’s actually because of archaeological methods and our preconceptions that we still keep talking about small sites all the time – we are about to publish this theory in the next issue of Antiquity.



Location of Star Carr excavation trenches – Clark, grey; VPRT, blue; Milner, red – and fieldwalking (yellow) relative to the peninsula on palaeo-Lake Flixton (Reproduced with kind permission of the Vale of Pickering Research Trust)

As well as attracting a lot of attention from the media, Star Carr has interested a lot of academics. How has the interpretation of what life might have been like at Star Carr changed over the last sixty years and is there currently any consensus on perhaps the most contentious question, that of the seasonality of its use?

Well that's right. There have been so many different interpretations and I think even the three of us who have directed it (Chantal Conneller, Barry Taylor and I) probably have different views about how it was used. The main problem is that we're dealing with one piece of the jigsaw here. We've dug a very small amount, and all these past interpretations have been based on that small area of excavation done by Clark. We also have another interesting fact in that we know Clark threw back into the backfill quite a lot of bone that he couldn't identify; so when we dug in 2010, there were a large number of rib bones in the backfill. So the samples that are in the Natural History Museum are very biased samples that don't really reflect what was there, never mind the whole site. We won't really get a better picture until we dig more.

In terms of the seasonality, I also think that it's almost a question that we can't answer because it's too complicated a site.

Grahame Clark was famous in archaeology for advocating that archaeologists should look at the environmental context of a site, rather than just its settlement or worked objects? How important do you think his views were in contributing towards the way archaeologists look at the past today?

Well to be honest, I think Grahame Clark is the founding father of Mesolithic Archaeology in this country. It was his way of doing things, considering the environment as well as the artefacts that really changed the way people studied the Mesolithic. We would barely know anything about the Mesolithic had he not

encouraged other people to study it. It's quite an interesting question - what would have happened had Grahame Clark not studied the Mesolithic. There was no one else really doing it at the time, and there were people like Gordon Childe who were quite disparaging about the Mesolithic.



A re-excavated section of the birch tree originally found by Clark (Reproduced with kind permission of Nicky Milner)

Do you think what Clark found at Star Carr was important in this change in way that archaeology looks at the past?

That's actually a difficult question to answer. What I do think is that what he found prompted people to try to find other Mesolithic sites like Star Carr.

As you say, Star Carr does seem to hold a very special place in Mesolithic Britain. What do you think are the reasons that Star Carr is so special and unique? Is it the environmental preservation or just the way it has been looked at compared to other places..?

Well my feeling is that it's probably the artefacts because when you start counting the number of barbed points found there compared to other places, or the head dresses or beads... no one has found anything else like it which is why I think the artefacts are the number one factor. But I think there are other things as well, like the environmental context, which make it very important too; and the fact that he published it very quickly as a monograph.

Congratulations on securing £1.23 million funding from the European Research Council in January to continue looking at Star Carr. What are the reasons for you receiving this funding and what will it enable you to do?

Thank you, yes it's fantastic! It basically funds a group of scientists to do further cutting-edge scientific research on finds and to do three or four more seasons of excavation. We have nearly twenty specialists, based both here in York and elsewhere who are leading experts in the country. So the money goes towards those people working on the Project and also the costs of doing scientific analyses.



Sampling soil for chemical analyses at Flixton Island this summer (Reproduced with kind permission of Nicky Milner)

What are the main things you're hoping to achieve by returning to Star Carr?

One of our big things is to uncover the whole of the platform before it deteriorates for good, because we don't really understand how it was constructed, what it was used for, or why it seems to stretch across such a large area of the lake. It is the earliest known evidence for carpentry in Europe so we need a better understanding. We also want to look at the dryland part of the site; we want to know whether there are more structures. We also want to apply forensic methods to look at how tools were used, and we've got geochemists involved to look at whether we can identify areas which may tell us about different kinds of activities that took place. So, we're basically trying to get a better picture of how people were living, and the spatial arrangement of their activities.

Is another reason for you returning to Star Carr because of the ongoing deterioration of organic remains at the site?

The deterioration is one of the things that has helped us get the funding, because if we don't go back within the next five to ten years the site just won't be there anymore, and there's still so much more to learn from it. First of all, we had to prove to English Heritage and other stake holders that the site is badly deteriorating – we've got two papers in the Journal of Archaeological Science which do that; and then we had to prove that there were still questions worth asking.

It seems odd that after thousands of years of brilliant preservation, many of the organic remains at Star Carr are suddenly deteriorating. Have you identified what it is that is causing such serious deterioration of organic remains at the site? How common is this at other sites?

It seems to be connected with drainage and because the drains take the water out of the land, the peat begins to shrink, oxidise and dry out; the water table gets lower and lower, so that means more oxygen gets into the sediments. It then creates chemical reactions, particularly with the sulphur in the sediments, and basically ends up creating sulphuric acid.

The sulphuric acid then eats away all the bone and antler. We have a PhD student at the moment, Kirsty High, who is doing more research on this because it's really quite complex. There are all sorts of other things at work as well, and one of the things we're really concerned about is bacteria in the deposits too, because it's bacteria that will eat away the wood.

In terms of other sites, I was in Germany a few weeks ago talking to colleagues from right across Europe and it seems that many of the bogs sites there are suffering in a similar way.

How does Star Carr link with your other work on the Mesolithic, and with other sites of the same age?

Well my other work on the Mesolithic focuses more on coastal sites and the later part of the Mesolithic, particularly shell middens.

In terms of other sites of the same age, what we are interested in doing is to put Star Carr in a wider context and work with colleagues in Europe. We've just set up a Stone Age Bog group made up of people right across Europe all dealing with similar kinds of issues and questions. Some of them have really amazing bog sites.

Do you currently have any idea of the longer term future of Star Carr and what will happen there?

No, not really. We finish in five years time on our project. Probably, anything that's left there, if it's on the dryland part of the site, will have to stay in a management agreement with English Heritage to be protected in that way; if anything is in the wetland parts, it will probably just deteriorate and there's nothing anyone can really do about that. So the key thing about Star Carr is that we should learn lessons from it for other sites, but the scary thing is just how many sites might be out there that are deteriorating and are unknown to us.

Star Carr currently takes up a lot of your time. Will it seem odd one day moving on from the site to focus on other projects?

I think once it's finished I will probably continue working on other wetland sites in the area – some of the others around the lake, because there's so much work to be done; but maybe I'll move on to other wetland sites in other places; or maybe I'll just move on to a completely different area of the Mesolithic! I think wetland sites are really important because they provide extra detail that other sites without that organic preservation don't.

Professor Milner and the Star Carr Project team have just published a booklet, 'The Story of Star Carr', on the history of investigations at Star Carr and what they have learnt from the site. Copies cost only £2.50 each. Information on how to order a copy is available via their website.

Recommended reading

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The excavation of burial mounds in Shestovitsa, Ukraine

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Archaeological methodology varies little from country to country. However, regional differences in terrain and research agendas call for different approaches depending on where you are excavating. Traditional excavation methods would require the excavation of the mound from the top-down in sections, usually quartering the mound, allowing for stratigraphic sections to be left in the middle in a cross shape. Once the burial is reached these sections would need to be taken down to the same level and the burial exposed. However, the type of soil and the presence of trees can prevent archaeologists from applying this method, and can create a need for improvisation.

The early medieval settlement of Shestovitsa is located 20 km south west of the city of Chernigov and has one of the largest and most excavated burial mound complexes in Ukraine. The mounds there are typically of a Scandinavian origin. The majority contain remains of the leaders of the Scandinavian 'druzhina' (the mercenary Viking army) of Kievan.

Located in the forests of Polesia, the dense and protected forest does not allow for excavations according to conventional methodology, and lack of funding does not allow for geophysical testing either (Figure 1).

Here the archaeologist E. N. Osadchiy practises a different method. With twenty years of archaeological experience, he has come up with what seems to be the most practical approach to this regional problem.



Figure 1: Position of trees around the trench

(Image Copyright: Stepan Stepanenko)

The method has three stages. The first, and perhaps the hardest stage, is the identification. One needs to be sure that the mound of earth about to be excavated is indeed a burial mound. This proves fairly easy at Shestovitsa, with such a high concentration of burials, but isolated mounds are still present.

In the words of E.N. Osadchiy, "the best way of getting good at identifying a burial mound is practice". But even a fresher can go about finding their very own burial mound with a few tips.

One of the easiest and quickest identification characteristics is the presence of a ditch surrounding the mound. However, these tend to be filled in with either the original fill, or soil deposits that occur over time with natural soil movement. If there is a group of relatively low mounds (up to 2 metres above ground level) in an otherwise flat terrain, this can also be indicative of the presence of burials.

The second and most tedious stage is the removal of the top soils and the fill of the mound, allowing for the position of the trees that grow throughout the mound group. Although some of them are allowed to be cut down by the forestry commission, this comes at a monetary cost. With Ukrainian archaeology being majorly underfunded and the country being synonymous with corruption, archaeologists have found other ways around the issue.

The top soil is removed manually using a spade; a tool which they are rather fond of in Ukraine, it seeming to almost replace the trowel (Figure 2)! The mound is excavated from the top down with some of the trees being left in place. The possibility of excavation in quarters is out of the question, as trees could end up right in the middle of a section. Instead the walls of the trench are arranged in such a manner as to leave them outside of the boundaries of the trees. This method results in an excavation area which radically contrasts with the traditional ‘square’ (Figure 3). One of the major downsides of this method is that a part of the mound may be left unexplored. However, with archaeological savvy one can place the excavation trench so as to leave out only the areas least ‘interesting’ to archaeology (sections of the moat around the mound, etc.).

As burials are placed either on top of the natural layer or just above it, the removal of top soil stops as soon as the natural or the top of the burial are visible. At this stage, the trench may be extended by the same method if the full extent of the burial is not within the excavated area.



Figures 2 & 3: Shovels rather than trowels; unusual trench dimensions (Image Copyright: Stepan Stepanenko, both)

The third and final stage of the excavation is the removal of the burial, followed by excavating down to the natural soil throughout the trench. The burial itself is removed in metre square sections, being brought down to the same level in all the sections simultaneously. This is perhaps the quickest stage of the excavation. E.N. Osadchiy is adamant that the tools for this stage should be knives and brushes. "A knife is much thinner than the trowel and allows for intricate details like teeth and small bones to be treated with more care" he says. This level of attention is particularly important at Shestovitsa, where the lack of post-excavation sieving can easily result in the loss of small objects such as pins and buttons.

After the removal of the burial and reaching the natural, only the backfilling remains. Before the backfilling, E.N. Osadchiy is adamant that something should be left at the bottom of the excavated area in case one day future archaeologists should return to the same site; "Something with a date on it, like a bottle or a can" - an excellent excuse for a celebratory bottle of champagne.

The traditional methodology of burial mound excavations is a great guideline for archaeological practice. However, with regional variations in terrain, climate and legislation it is inevitable that archaeologists will sometimes have to adapt their methods. In essence, the methodology of Shestovitsa is not very different. Other than the minimal stratigraphic recording, it is in fact very similar. This serves as a testament to the universal applications of the traditional methodology, and to the innovative nature of Ukrainian archaeologists.

On the edge of the Moors: digging Boltby Scar hillfort

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Despite the fact that we are Archaeology Undergraduates, most first year students have never been on an archaeological excavation before, let alone had a full appreciation of what it would entail. As part of the course there is a compulsory module entitled 'Archaeological Excavation'. The name is self-explanatory, and in the lead up to starting the dig all the various site leaders gave lectures trying to convince us that their site was the 'most interesting'. At this point there appeared a divide amongst students that had previously gone unnoticed; the divide had two sides – historians and prehistorians. Whilst the historians were enticed by the promise of endless finds (at Gawthorpe Manor), the prehistorians were pulled in by the mystery and uncertainty of a site about which relatively little was known.

Boltby Scar has undergone excavations prior to the work that is now being conducted by the Landscape Research Centre (LRC). However, poor record keeping has meant that next to nothing has come from these endeavours, bar a sketch, some notes and some gold earrings (Powlesland 2009). The site of Boltby Scar is a scheduled monument (a monument protected by law as it is deemed to have archaeological significance); despite this classification, in 1961 unauthorised agricultural work involving a bulldozer destroyed integral parts of the site's archaeology and history, including the total destruction of what is thought to have been a round barrow (Powlesland 2009).

The most recent excavations have aimed at uncovering new evidence that will allow for greater insight into what the site was used for, whilst also collecting environmental samples that will help date the site. In 2009, a team of volunteers and research specialists set to work at the site with the ambition of uncovering evidence that could lead to reconstructions of some aspects of the hillfort to enhance understanding of the occupation.

The excavations taking place at Boltby Scar this year had several key aims. Firstly, the team were attempting to learn more about what was suspected of being Iron Age and Early Bronze Age activity in the area. This would also include endeavouring to ascertain the relationship between the palisade (this is an enclosure or fence) and hillfort, and to find out if there was more than one entrance. The next aim was to uncover any activity (domestic or otherwise) related to the hillfort, or even pre-hillfort; whilst also determining whether one of the features previously identified is a long barrow, house or something else entirely (Powlesland 2012).

On our first day of excavation we found ourselves up at what for a student was a horrifically early hour (the rest of society call it 8am), followed a little while later by being herded up the side of a very steep hill. When we eventually reached the top, we found what was going to be our second home for the following three weeks. Ironically, on that very first day the weather was extremely warm, and misleading as it was not to remain as pleasant for the rest of our time at Boltby Scar.

We were set to work almost immediately, following brief introductions with our supervisors, and were handed buckets and trowels (and the more physically able of us, mattocks). Prior to our arrival at the site the trenches, which were to be the focus of the excavation, had been cleared by machinery. Following this we were charged with cleaning the trenches. This primarily involved straightening the sections and clearing the bottom of the trench, so that features became more visible.

Although that sounds like a simple task, what became clear very quickly was that the ability to trowel well is something that can only be obtained through experience. During this we heard many subjective phrases about ‘the texture and colour of the soil’ and ‘the feel of the surface’. By the end of the three weeks we were also using these seemingly bizarre phrases ourselves! We worked on the clearing of the trenches for several days, something that became increasingly difficult with the steady deterioration of the weather.



Some of the students at work in Trench AG (Used with kind permission of Barbara Grant)

After this part of the dig had been completed we began to work on excavating some of the features in the trench designated ‘AG’. The palisade enclosure ran right through this trench, and it was excavated at regular intervals in an attempt to track its progress and observe whether there had been a consistent method of construction (anon. nd.). For the most part this was a relatively straightforward process, as the clearing of the bottom of the trench and removal of topsoil etc. had uncovered the palisade so that it was clear which parts required excavation.

Unfortunately the truncation of the site by a bulldozer meant that in one stretch the palisade disappeared from sight completely. This meant that the section needed to be excavated blind, something not usually done in archaeology, where the general rule is ‘if it can’t be seen then it won’t be excavated’. Despite this

minor complication the palisade was successfully excavated, and by sheer chance uncovered a particularly interesting section, where there appeared to be three post pipes (these are holes that have a very precise form where the wood in the slot did not survive).



Intact sections of the palisade foundations in Trench AG (Used with kind permission of Barbara Grant)

Whilst the palisade was being investigated some members of the group were excavating a ditch that ran alongside. Unfortunately this part of the excavation was never completed as bad weather later in the dig meant that the side of the ditch collapsed and it became too dangerous for excavation to continue.

In the same trench (AG), a previous excavation's trench was also being excavated (anon. nd.). This previous excavation was carried out by a man called Wilmott during the antiquarian period. However the aim of Wilmott's excavation had little to do with obtaining information about the era in which the archaeology occurred, but rather was to collect artefacts indicative of the era, for display or personal gratification. Wilmott also excavated the round barrow at the site and uncovered a pair of gold earrings. Due to the nature of archaeology at the time of Wilmott's excavation there is little record of the work done. Hence the trenches he opened are being re-excavated (Powlesland 2009).

The round barrow also underwent excavation, following the trench that had been excavated previously by Wilmott (who left limited notes, in which he recorded a hearth, though no evidence of this has been found so far). A stone ring was uncovered, along with a few post holes, which may have been used to support some sort of construction.

A coffin was also found though unfortunately because of the nature of the soil and the ground no organic remains survived, but it was evident from the stratigraphy and the colour of the soil that this was the case. Again, no skeletal remains were uncovered. Despite Wilmott claiming to have found the gold earrings in the barrow, no other such artefacts have been found. There were however an abundance of flints (arrow heads and blades) from within this area.

In trench AK a sub group were working towards excavating the rampart, and following the palisade enclosure to see if it continued that far back. Following the completion of the excavation we were all shown how to take section drawings, plans and how to complete finds and records sheets; which we continued to do for the last week of excavation. We were also taught how to input data on the palm pilots, to allow for quick and easy data processing.

Many of us who went to Boltby Scar had never taken part in an excavation prior to this one, and before we went to the site people were unsure of what to expect. Having now completed a dig, many people are keen to continue. In fact some of the group decided to return for an extra few days of excavation because they enjoyed the experience so much. Not long before we started at Boltby Scar, we were all informed by the site leader Dominic Powlesland that excavation “is the most fun you can have without taking your clothes off”, at the time this seemed a ridiculous statement, however, if asked now the majority of the group who worked at Boltby Scar would be very quick to agree.

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Exploring the Iron Age in North Duffield

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Professor Archaeology North Duffield (AND) was formed as a sub-group of North Duffield Conservation and Local History Society in 2009. Until that time, the Society's activities had been restricted to documentary research, conservation and the maintenance of photographic archives. Other than a small number of 'watching briefs', no archaeological investigations are recorded as having taken place within the Parish.

After its formation AND embarked upon a programme of field-walking and landscape surveying in partnership with York Archaeological Trust, previously reported in Issue 13 of The Post Hole. Since then, having successfully obtained Lottery Funding in 2011 AND has embarked on a three year Historic Landscape Project.

In 2011 a test-pit survey in resident's gardens resulted in the recovery of a considerable amount of pottery (The Post Hole, Issue 18). Most of this pottery was out of context, indicated by the fact that it was recovered from the plough soil. One cottage garden was an exception to this however. From this garden, a considerable number of later Medieval and Norman pottery sherds were recovered, in addition to the more important discovery of three contiguous pieces of Roman grey ware, apparently in the same context as three large stones, later thought to be pot-boilers.

AND has also been working with pupils from North Duffield Community Primary School; excavating test-pits in the school playing fields for the Big School Digs 2011 and 2012. An education pack created by AND, based on the Iron Age and the transition into the Roman period, has been prepared and trialled very successfully, and has now been adopted by the school for inclusion in the local curriculum. It will also be made available to other primary schools upon request.

As part of the same project, AND are also building a re-construction of an Iron Age roundhouse using entirely locally sourced materials. The roof is currently being built, and it is hoped that the local school children will apply the daub to the wattle walls in the near future. The roundhouse, when complete, will be used as an educational resource with demonstrations of spinning, weaving, pole-lathe working, milling and bread making taking place.



AND's reconstruction of an Iron Age round house in progress (Image Copyright: Brian Elsey)

In 2008, AND acquired the Vale of York Mapping Project transitions of cropmarks from English Heritage. This showed complex cropmarks to the North and West of the village as well as other smaller concentrations elsewhere.

AND made the decision to investigate some of these cropmarks with a view to identifying the features and, where possible, obtaining dating evidence. Three potential targets were identified: a linear feature running E-W, thought to be a ditch, a round feature with a doorway facing S-E, thought to be an Iron Age hut-circle, and a junction of what appeared to be two short ditches and a two-sided feature. AND's attempts to identify the main ditch with Magnetometry were unsuccessful, but a resistivity survey did locate the ditch. In a second attempt to gain greater clarity, the resistivity meter was found to be malfunctioning, and it was necessary to 'fix' the features positions using triangulation.

This dig, which was included in the Council for British Archaeology's Festival of British Archaeology, ran from the 21st to the 28th of July 2012, with Dr. Jon Kenny, a Community Archaeologist, and Hannah Baxter of the York Archaeological Trust providing the professional oversight. The rest of the team comprised a combination of experienced and novice diggers from AND, as well as members from surrounding archaeological groups, students on placement, volunteers from the University of York and a number of professional archaeologists and ex-archaeologists. We were also able to involve a small number of children and one person with learning difficulties, something I am keen to develop further.

We opened up three trenches. In Trench 1, after the plough-soil had been removed, indications of the linear ditch were immediately found. We were able to find the cut of the original ditch, albeit in a collapsed state, as well as some pottery, thought to be early Iron Age, and one rim sherd of what appears to be Roman grey ware. A ditch found in Trench 4, opened up to the West of trench 1, confirmed the continuity of the ditch and recovered further items of Iron Age pottery. Unfortunately, the ditch did what it was probably dug for in the first place, and rapidly accumulated water to a depth of twelve inches or so, precluding the excavation of the bottom of the ditch.



The ditch in Trench 1 (Image Copyright: Brian Elsey)

Work in Trench 2 was initially less successful. After removal of the plough soil a number of features were investigated, but it was clear that the trench had missed the round feature observed in the cropmarks. The trench was then accordingly enlarged which showed a shadow in the SW corner and led to the discovery of the curving impression we were seeking.

Two slots, or sondages, cut into this feature showed a shallow, round-bottomed ‘cut’ containing items of Iron Age pottery. Using the curve of this feature we made a projection of its overall size and estimated it to be in the region of 30 metres in diameter. This is very likely to be too large for a hut-circle and therefore more likely to be a ring ditch. We may return to this feature in the future to investigate the centre and doorway.



Ring ditch in Trench 2 (Image Copyright: Brian Elsey)

Trench 3 failed to produce the unusual feature shown in the cropmarks, but a number of quite old, and modern, field-drains were investigated and further items of Iron Age pottery were recovered.

The excavation exceeded our expectations in terms of the number of volunteers arriving to dig each day, as well as in relation to the calibre of the diggers and the professionalism in the way they conducted the dig. In addition, we found the ditch and the round feature together with dating evidence, assuming that the suspected Iron Age pottery was correctly identified.

The finds are currently with Tony Austin of the University of York for formal identification. In total we recovered 14 pieces of believed Iron Age pottery of a total weight in excess of 200gms.

We had a pool of 40 volunteers, most of whom, as you would expect, were present on the Saturday and Sunday. We also managed upwards of 15 people most weekdays allowing us to complete the dig on schedule, although it did get a little frantic on the final day. We also had a fair number of visitors to the site, many of whom tried their hand at digging.

The farmer, upon whose land the dig took place, was so enthused by everything he wanted to continue on into the next week. Unfortunately, time and manpower precluded such an event, not to mention an ocean of paper, finds to be washed, dried and catalogued, bureaucracy in the form of checking cross-referencing of all the context sheets and photographs, plans etc.

One of our members owns a plane and, at my request, flew over the site. He visited shortly afterwards with a request that he needed a light person with a good camera. Hannah was volunteered and agreed to go. Having swooped about the site taking pictures she returned an hour later with an ear-to-ear grin.



Aerial photography and view of the site (Image Copyright: Brian Elsey, both)

Dissertation and other degree advice from York graduates

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Eight ways to make the most of your dissertation, Callum Reilly (BA Historical Archaeology)

Writing a dissertation is no small task. Unfortunately, there are few ‘secrets’, but there are several things you can do to improve your approach to research. When you are gathering large amounts of data from primary sources, or your own practical research, not to mention writing 10,000 words about it, taking a positive approach will help you stay on track. The eight tips below will help you do just that.

- 1) Read as widely as possible. This may mean reading outside of your chosen topic; consider how your topic has been studied in other time periods or geographical regions. This may sadly mean you only use half of what you read, but it will help you pick out potential unanswered research questions.
- 2) Make your notes your own. If you make notes as you read, don't just summarise the article. You can also write down your own thoughts, though make sure to distinguish them in some way. These may include questions raised, other research the article relates to, methodological flaws, interpretative biases, and so on. Drawing on these points whilst you are writing will help you demonstrate critical thinking.
- 3) Think thematically. Themes include settlement, subsistence, economy, power, landscape, identity, memory, religion and commemoration. Thinking about these wider issues, where relevant, is a great way to embed the research into ‘what has been done before’, thereby justifying your research.
- 4) Think theoretically. Reading about, and incorporating some theory will strengthen your argument. This is because it will allow you to pick out theoretical flaws in other peoples arguments and in your own, in which case you can redevelop them to address the flaws.
- 5) Ask why. This is yet another way of showing critical awareness, and there are countless questions available to answer. ‘Why has an area of study been ignored?’ ‘Why do we see the same data patterns across different regions?’ Even if your research confirms previous research, ask why we should or should not expect it to do so.
- 6) Have original discussion points. Although having an original research aim is important, it is not always enough to rely on this. Finding something new to say might be daunting, but it could be as simple as saying whether a new methodology you have used has been successful, or explaining what studying a particular site tells us that another could not.

7) Signpost clearly where necessary. Using signposting, such as 'for example', 'however' or 'despite this', will help structure your argument. But be wary of overusing them. A paragraph full of 'howevers', or similar phrases, will suggest your argument is either not developed enough, or not structured clearly.

8) And finally, make the most of your resources. In particular, be sure to have something to ask and something to show your supervisor for your supervisorials. Take some time to look at books such as *The Craft of Research* (Booth et al. 2003), which is a handy reference guide on writing arguments and presenting your research. You can also have a look at chapters 12 and 13 in *The Archaeology Coursebook* (Grant et al. 2008).

One last piece of advice: stay sane and take the time to put your dissertation to one side for a while. This will not only help you relax, but will also help you think more clearly and critically about your own research. One and a half years might seem like a short time to gather data and write 10,000 words in relation to your research question or aim, but it will at least prove enough time to understand what approaches work best for you. Good luck!

Recommended reading

Booth, W.C., Colomb, G.G. and Williams, J.M. (2003) *The Craft of Research* (2nd ed.) Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Grant, J., Gorin, S. and Fleming, N. (2008) *The Archaeology Coursebook* (3rd ed.) London: Routledge

Getting through the ups and downs of Third Year, Rachelle Martyn (BSc Bioarchaeology)

My original feelings towards third year were somewhere between excitement and fear of that moment when you eventually find yourself sitting on your bed in an oversized jumper, eating an entire box of celebrations, considering when it would be appropriate to call your mum in tears...

Thankfully, this year was (relatively) unheeded. In fact, third year brought for me, the best of my three years at university. It is difficult to give general advice because we all vary in the attitudes we hold towards work, the manner in which we deal with stress and our overall outlook on the degree. However, being on the severe end of the highly strung spectrum I can offer some pointers which may be used to varying degrees, depending on the nature of the individual student.

Firstly, and probably most importantly: start early. The module in your first term is great but you'll find you neglect your dissertation. This is understandable given the work load, however, maintain a degree of

attention towards your dissertation because doing so will put you in a much better position come second term. Furthermore, starting early helps both to alleviate last-minute panic and allows for work to be revised numerous times. Unfortunately, none of us can produce a detailed, structured, concise and bibliographically accurate piece of work in the first draft; so allowing yourself time to go over it can only make it better. Makes sense!

Secondly, and this is really just stressing the importance of time: edit everything. There's nothing like the feeling of hitting that 10,000 word count on your dissertation. Over the course of last term we all found ourselves recognising the same look of relief on each others faces when we thought the end was nigh. Unfortunately, it wasn't. Many of you will find yourselves over the word count, and all of you will have pictures, captions, graphs and illustrations which you need to include or rearrange. It is within the editing stage that you can turn your 10,000 words of well researched transcript into something which is as impressive aesthetically as it is academically. However, it is easy to underestimate this process. I gave myself two weeks for editing and was still finding text boxes flying around my pages until the morning before printing. You just need to try and judge it right.

Finally, enjoy your modules! Third year really allows you to refine your skills as an academic and, if you want to, specialise these and your knowledge, within a field that you truly enjoy. My modules allowed me to immerse myself in subjects that did not just encompass all aspects of biological archaeology, but also captured my imagination and made me want to learn all that I could in the short time I had. By the time they came to an end, I had not merely discovered unsung heroes of archaeological sub-disciplines; I had also come to appreciate, in conjunction with the dissertation, the scale of what we as third years were undertaking.

And this is ultimately what third year was for me. Ignoring the stress, the setbacks and the hours in front of a computer, the last year of your undergraduate degree will show you just how far you have come as an academic. By the time you graduate you will have produced a dissertation the credit for which is completely yours, obtained invaluable practical and collaborative experience and refined your skills as a researcher, an orator, and, most importantly, an archaeologist!

There is no denying the importance of third year and the work you will undertake during this time. However, as you stand on the precipice of your final year, think back to what you have already achieved. In a year's time your career as an undergraduate will be over. Time really does fly so yes, ensure you start early, do the research and edit thoroughly, but most of all, make the most of the time you have left. There really is nothing like it.

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<http://www.theposthole.org/authors>

Submission deadlines

The Post Hole releases nine issues per academic year on a **monthly** basic between October and June. The submissions deadline for all of *The Post Hole's* monthly issues is the **final Wednesday** of the preceding month.

Submission length

Articles of any length **up to 2,500 words** are welcome, though keeping below 2,000 words is preferable.

Figures

Photographs, graphs, plans and other images are also welcome as they usually help illustrate the content of submissions. All images should be submitted separately to any documents (ie. not embedded in text, but sent to *The Post Hole* as attachments).

It is preferable that photographs are submitted in **.jpg format**, and graphs, plans and other linear images are submitted in **.png format**. Please contact the Submissions Editor if you are unsure about image formats or anything else regarding your submission.

How to submit

All submissions should be sent to ***The Post Hole Submissions Editor, Tess Margetts***, by email (submissions@theposthole.org).

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