

The Student Run Archaeology Journal

# THE POST HOLE

Issue 20 February 2012



## The Fieldwork Issue

A review of Boltby Scar student excavation 2011,  
the 'lost art' of graveyard survey and two PhD  
students at York talk about their experiences

# The Post Hole

## Issue 20

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Cover image by Izzy Winder

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## 1 Editorial

Jennifer Borrett (<mailto:jb793@york.ac.uk>)

Welcome to Issue 20 of The Post Hole, and thank you for reading! We have created what we hope is a very enjoyable and interesting journal for the start of the Spring Term. We have an interview with King's Manor researcher Matthew Williams and PhD student Ben Elliot. Matthew discusses diving and underwater archaeology in the Red Sea and Ben talks about his PhD research into antler use during the Mesolithic. As well as this, we have an article on how graveyard survey is performed, something that has been lost from the undergraduate curriculum for the past two years; and an insight into studying as a postgraduate at King's Manor.

For some light entertainment, we have also included an amusing guide to student etiquette in lectures and seminars! Who here has done the uniquely panther-like 'late walk' when entering a lecture that started ten minutes ago?

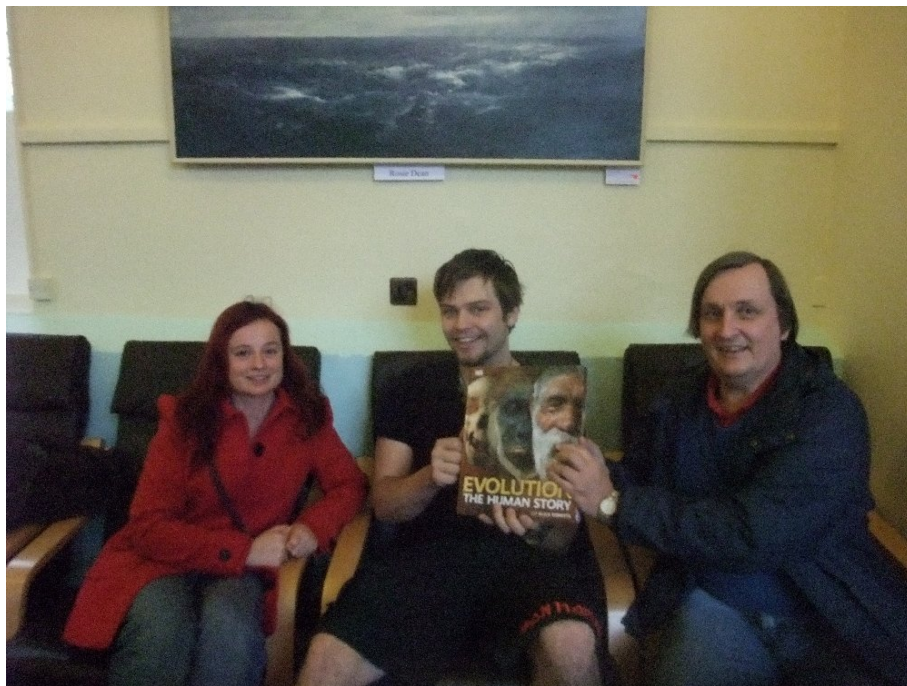
There is also lots of good news for the archaeology department. Navin Piplani has received the Glory of India Award for his contribution to conservation while at King's Manor as Director of Studies at the Centre for Conservation Studies. Two new lecturers have arrived: Sara Perry will be lecturing in cultural heritage management and Michelle Mundeel will be lecturing in bioarchaeology, so a warm welcome is extended to them. Congratulations to Paul O'Higgins, Flora Gronning, Terry O'Connor and Michi Hofrieter whose papers were included in the Guardian's top ten biggest science stories of 2011. Paul and Flora have dated a jawbone fragment from Kent's Cavern to over 40,000 years ago showing a significant overlap of *Homo sapiens* and Neanderthals in Europe, whereas Terry and Michi's paper discusses the realism of horses in Palaeolithic cave paintings. This shows how strong the position of King's Manor is in archaeological research. We are very fortunate to be studying here. Finally, congratulations to Nicky Milner and the Star Carr team, not only for Star Carr being made a scheduled monument, but also for gaining a 1.5 million Euro research grant. No doubt this will lead to some extremely exciting new insights in the future.

Sadly, this is my last issue. I have very much enjoyed being involved in the Post Hole, but my dissertation commitments and lone parenting mean that I have serious time constraints and can no longer give the journal the time and attention that it needs.

Thank you for reading and I hope you enjoyed the issue. One last point: the Post Hole works on a limited budget and can only print 3 or 4 copies, so please return this issue to where you found it, so others can read it. The Post Hole has proven so popular it keeps vanishing! Thanks everyone for your continued support and readership, and as always, feel free to send us lots of articles!

Jenny

PS: Sorry there is no Theory 101 this issue, hopefully it will be back soon.



*Jenny and Mark presenting Alice Roberts competition winner Sam Briscoe with his prize (Image Copyright – Mark Simpson)*

In addition to the above, I would like to thank Jenny for her hard work, ideas and enthusiasm over the last eight months and I speak for the entire Post Hole team in saying we are sorry to lose her and wish her well with her studies.

Mark



## 2 Matt Williams Interview

**Khadija McBain** (<mailto:secretary@theposthole.org>)

Matt Williams is a PhD student and Research Associate at the University of York Archaeology Department and part of the DISPERSE Project (see link at end of interview), under the leadership of Professor Geoff Bailey.

Post Hole Secretary Khadija McBain conducted this fascinating interview with Matt in December 2011.

**Khadija McBain** – Among the students at King’s Manor, and because there are so many Matthews in the department, you are known as *’oh that surfer guy’*. Are you actually a surfer?

**Matt Williams** -I love surfing! Specialising in coastal archaeology allows me to visit the best surf spots in the world whilst working, which is a dream! The Senegal trip is probably the best surf/work trip I have had, the waves were awesome! The archaeology was not so bad either! I have surfed some pretty awesome places, but I get my fix wherever I can, which most of the time is Scarborough or Cayton bay.

**KM** – Can you tell us about your current post-doc research and what it entails – how is this different to your PhD research? What do you enjoy most about it?

**MW** – The post-doc focuses on coastal archaeology in the Red Sea, which is basically the same as the PhD. For the PhD I tried to work out why there were so many shell middens in one area, and when they dated to. My PhD found there are nearly 3000 shell middens some up to 5m high on the Farasan Islands (in the southern Red Sea), dating to 6000-4500BP which corresponds nicely with other shell middens from around the world.

The post-doc is looking at the same sites with reference to a number of specific questions. These are: how do shell middens accumulate; what influence do environmental factors (climate/geomorphology/etc) have on midden formation processes; can the location of shell midden sites be predicted? And if so can Holocene shell midden sites be used as an analogy to find earlier sites which have been inundated by rising sea level and are now located on submerged palaeoshorelines?

There will be a lot more fieldwork out to the Red Sea, and probably a good deal of diving looking for older sites. What I love about my research is that it is awesome. Coastal archaeology combines a whole range of archaeological sub-disciplines; I love the variety, the collaboration, and the potential to go further and deeper.

**KM** – Why coastal archaeology? How does this differ from inland archaeology? And how does this relate to Shell Middens and the movement of prehistoric people?

**MW** – In many cases coastal archaeology has a high potential for research. Coastlines can be very dynamic with lots of erosion or deposition; this often preserves sites before exposing them many generations later. Sites are usually destroyed as they are exposed, so it is a double edged sword, but they can be remarkably well preserved such as at Bouldnor Cliff (it is a pretty sweet site, you should look it up). In the Red Sea where I work, the modern population is pretty sparse, so there is very little development; on top of this the climate is hyper-arid and there is hardly any rain. This means that there is very little

erosion or deposition and the sites are pristine. It is amazing, seeing artefacts on the surface as if they had been dropped yesterday!



*Figure 1 – Matt diving in the Red Sea (Image Copyright – Matt Williams)*

The key difference between coastal and inland archaeology is the added dimension of the sea. The coastal margin is hard to define – how much marine influence does a site need to be classified as coastal? Or how little marine influence makes a site terrestrial? As I have already mentioned the sea offers unique opportunities for preservation and discovery, and this extends to diving underwater.

With regards to shell middens and the movement of prehistoric people, shell middens show that people were exploiting marine resources. In the Red Sea the sheer scale of the sites (both number and size) suggest a very intensive marine exploitation. The location of the islands 40km from the mainland also shows that people were mobile and competent sea farers. This is supported by material from the mainland (mainly lithics) associated with the middens.

**KM** – Why did you choose to pursue a post-doc? What experience have you acquired since you started your post-doc? Where do you think your research will be going next?

**MW** – After my undergraduate degree I pursued a number of careers which I did not really enjoy. Rather than do something I did not like I decided to become an archaeologist, and worked commercially. I really enjoy fieldwork, but I also really enjoy research, which in commercial archaeology is hard to get into. The easiest way for me to do research was to do a PhD, and then try and get a post-doc afterwards. I started the post-doc in October, and have already started learning new techniques such as a shell processing technique developed by Eva Laurie in the department. Where next? I would really like to work

abroad and experience different research cultures and ways of working. But who knows what will happen!

**KM** – You’ve done fieldwork in the Farasan Islands, Scotland, Senegal, and many other places – which one has been your favourite so far? Are you intending to do more fieldwork in 2012? What advice would you give to first years looking forward to/dreading fieldwork in summer term?

**MW** – Definitely Senegal it was so different. The archaeology is amazing; they have shell mounds which are the size of large settlements, huge! I was also fortunate enough to be able to visit a shell midden in the making; a small family unit who seasonally gathered mangrove shellfish for market, processed them on the same site year after year. This was resulting in a small shell mound growing; you could see where the centre of activity had been changing between seasons. It was pretty special. I actually got to sit with them and process some of the shells: Simple, but mind blowing.



*Figure 2 – Matt helping to process shells (Image Copyright – Matt Williams)*

Fieldwork can be great fun the field-school is always a good laugh, no matter if you love fieldwork, have never done it, or even if it is not your thing! There is great comradeship and the sites are always interesting. I have taught on it most years and everyone has had a great laugh.

I am already planning fieldwork for 2012 in the Red Sea, and I am always looking for willing students to participate in both fieldwork and post-excavation work.

If you want to pursue fieldwork or lab-work for your dissertation (or even personal interest and experience) there is loads of opportunity within the department. From PhD students to staff there are lots of researchers who need help either in the field or in the lab. If you are interested get in touch with the relevant person, the staff webpages give a good idea of what projects are ongoing.

**KM** – So what is going on with the DISPERSE project at the moment?

**MW** – We are currently planning fieldwork and which areas we want to investigate. This involves mapping using satellite images and bathymetry data to find areas that might have the best potential for sites and preservation. We are also putting together a number of publications and presentations.

**KM** – You have taken part in fieldwork in Saudi Arabia, was there a big culture difference? Also, in regards to alcohol, how did you manage going without? We all know archaeologists have a reputation for liking their beer. . .

**MW** – It is very interesting and different, but as long as you are sensitive to local customs then you are fine. They are very friendly and welcoming people (as most people are!) and we have developed a good relationship with the locals and we always have collaborators in the country in question. If in doubt a little banter about football always breaks the ice it seems everyone follows the Premiership!

Assuming you are not addicted, going without alcohol for a month is not that hard. However it is always nice to have a refreshing beer after a hard day's labour, and non-alcoholic beer never seems to hit the spot. However they do have a mythical pudding called KUNAFI, it is a caramel cheese cake which tastes better than anything ever. . . . mmmmmm. . . . .

**KM** – Do you have any advice for students thinking about pursuing a PhD and how to go about the process? What options come next?

**MW** – PhD's can be amazing. It is an opportunity to focus on an area of research which you are really interested in. It also offers the possibility to do projects on the side, which is definitely to be recommended.

- If you want to do a PhD there are several key points to keep in mind:
- Choose a topic you are really motivated by; it can get stressful at times so it is useful to have something you really want to do.
- Be determined, the application process can be hard, and you might not get funding the first time around but keep trying.
- If you do not have a specific idea but know the area you want to study talk to a member of staff.
- You also need to make sure you pitch your application well. You can have a great idea but it needs to be pitched to the funding committee in the right way. Again members of staff can help with this.

It is useful to look around; in York you are often expected to have a Masters before you start a PhD. However in many departments you can skip the Masters.

After a PhD there are a number of pathways you can choose. A post-doc is a good way to continue an academic career. But many people choose to go commercially, if you are into conservation, for example, a PhD is a useful qualification (not essential though!). A recent PhD graduate from the department has just set up his own company. Some people choose to get a "normal" job, a number of graduate recruitment schemes add extra weight to PhD candidates and pay them more. Basically you can do anything you want!





*Figure 3 - A Senegal shell midden in the making (Image Copyright - Matt Williams)*

**KM** – Mesolithic or Neolithic?

**MW** – A contentious question! Different regions have different technologies and classifications. In Europe shell middens arise in the Mesolithic and continue into the Neolithic. In the Red Sea there is no Mesolithic (although some argue there is...), instead there is a pre-pottery Neolithic and pottery-Neolithic. I work in the pre-pottery Neolithic. Is that an answer?

**KM** – Underwater archaeology: there are a few sceptics, but how important is this to our understanding of submerged prehistoric coastlines? Have you taken part in underwater excavations and how does this compare to on land excavations?

**MW** – It is awesome! I have done a bit in the Red Sea and it is completely different to land based excavations, even if the techniques are all derivatives of each other. Swinging a mattock underwater is bizarre! It does offer the possibility for unparalleled preservation (aside from waterlogged on land) and for accessing sites from much earlier periods which are often not as well preserved on land. Just look at the material lifted from the North Sea! Huge amounts of land have been submerged, it is therefore incredibly important.

**KM** – Where is the best/cheapest pub to go to after lectures/seminars to ‘talk’ about essays, seminar topic and all that good stuff?

**MW** – Best Has got to be the Lamb and Lion: it is close, it has a fire, it serves good beer, it serves half decent food, it has a beer garden, and most importantly I can take my dogs in there!

Cheapest Everywhere seems expensive in York!

**KM** – Are you teaching at the moment? Does this give you a different dimension to your research?

**MW** – I am doing a little, and yes, it always gives new dimensions to research. Whether it is ideas stemming from discussions or new material covered it all feeds back into research.

**KM** – You have worked at Cosmo magazine before – has that scarred you for life? Or is archaeology helping you get over it?

**MW** – Cosmo had its perks, but it was a job I did not enjoy. But you have to make the best of any situation, and I learnt a number of skills which I have been able to apply in archaeology. And yes, archaeology is one of my therapies, along with surfing.

You can learn more about the DISPERSE Project at the website <http://tinyurl.com/7452fya>

### 3 Boltby Scar Excavation 2011

Navid Tomlinson (<mailto:nt588@york.ac.uk>)

Our excavation at Boltby Scar began on May 3rd 2011. This was the first archaeological excavation I had ever visited, let alone been a part of, and from day one I was hooked. Boltby Scar has a complex history, which is one reason for its appeal. We must examine not one, but two excavations: the first was undertaken by G.F. Willmot, the notable Yorkshire antiquarian, in 1938 (Powlesland 2011a); the second, and most recent, was led by Professor Dominic Powlesland of the landscape research centre, aided by myself and around thirty other first year archaeologists. In 1961 much of the site was bulldozed in order to create more agricultural space. These events have vital roles to play in the story of this Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age hill fort and associated barrows that sit overlooking the Vale of Mowberry in the Yorkshire Moors.



*Figure 1 – Trench AD showing levelled rampart and barrow, along with enclosure entrance and ditch. (Image Copyright Rawlins-Welburn)*

First some context: Boltby Scar sits in a region rich with Bronze and Iron Age activity, such as the hill fort at Roulston Scar, the largest Iron Age fort of its kind in northern England, and the hill fort of Live Moor, also on the North Yorkshire Moors. Dykes such as Cockmoor Dyke and Cleave Dyke also provide a modern day reminder of the huge amount of activity occurring up on the Moors at this time. The hill fort at Boltby Scar fits nicely into this landscape as another monument to the human agency that went into the construction of this prehistoric region. The site at Boltby has been known since the 18th century (Powlesland, 2011a), and ever since has been under the close attention of antiquarians and in more recent years archaeologists alike. As early as 1868

the site was appearing in the writings of antiquarians (Powlesland, 2011a) but it was not until the excavation performed by Willmot in 1938 that any detailed records of the site were produced.

The main areas of focus for the 2011 excavation were threefold. Firstly, the entrance area identified by geophysical survey, thought to be the defences and supposed location of the Middle Bronze Age barrow. Secondly, the interior of the enclosure was to be examined in order to search for evidence of other settlement buildings. Finally, the larger still intact barrow was to be excavated for environmental and dating material (Powlesland, 2011a). The excavation groups were likewise split into three, with groups L and M working in the larger trench, AD, aimed at understanding the first barrow, the hill forts defences and the interior, and group K examining the second, still upstanding barrow.

It is safe to suggest that all three of the training excavations in 2011 and those of previous years began in the same way: troweling back. This oldest and noblest of archaeological traditions was possibly not one that some of those onsite considered to be the most enjoyable aspect of archaeology, and yet the excitement around the site following the first day of troweling when the structure of the hill fort was seen was palpable. The rampart and ditch, along with the entrance way became clear from day one and the significant size of these defences demonstrated the impressive nature of the site. The geophysical survey showed only one entrance way through the defences at Boltby, however it is possible that there was another on the southern, unexcavated side that did not show up on the survey (Powlesland, 2011a). Upon excavation of the section of the rampart that had escaped the charms of the bulldozer in the 1960s, we were all treated to Dominic Powlesland's extreme excitement in seeing such 'sexy stratigraphy' that proved the use of turf to face the rampart (Powlesland, 2011a).

A large part of the excavation was of the surrounding ditch to different levels. Thanks to environmental sampling, the layers of peat built up in the ditch allowed us to create a time frame for how the ditch began to fill up. However, we are currently still waiting for environmental results to be finalised to gain an accurate picture. The aim of excavating the ditch to its fullest extent, however, kept a number of excavators busy for nigh on the full four weeks, with heads gradually disappearing below the top of the trench. The results showed a depth of 1.5m, a significant size possibly suggesting this was more than simple enclosure and strengthening the evidence for a hill fort.

The excavation that we performed on the interior of the enclosure uncovered neither evidence of buildings, nor any significant evidence. Other than the first week when groups L and M had the questionable pleasure of excavating the significant bulldozer tracks, further excavation of the interior of the hill fort was limited to the excavation of some possible robber pits that may have been used to form the rampart. The most common find, and for the first two weeks the only finds were worked flints, which caused great excitement and competition amongst us undergrads, with each student keeping their own running tally and the most successful students trying (and mostly failing) to hide their glee. The few shards of pottery found just inside the entranceway to the enclosure gave us a date of c.800-900BC for its use. There could of course be further evidence for occupation in unexcavated areas, however current evidence suggests this could have simply been used as a temporary stopping point when moving across the landscape.





*Figure 2 – Ditch surrounding the site being excavated to different levels (Image Copyright – Rawlins-Welburn)*

The first barrow, located just inside the rampart and ditch and flattened by the bulldozer to make more agricultural land, was the focus of much of Wilmot's attentions. Some of the results of his excavations survive in sketch plans, but the most noticeable survival is that of the two early Bronze Age gold hair loops that he discovered at the base of the barrow. These are thought to be associated with a cremation which the 2011 excavation failed to identify beyond a small number of irretrievable bone fragments, despite the best efforts of those involved and the inevitable disappointment that Wilmot had got there first.

Group K were located a little way out from the main trench AD where L and M were working, and had the task of understanding the second, more intact barrow. Evidence from their excavation suggests that the barrow was put up in six stages, with the second phase being dated, thanks to a charred hazelnut, to around 1920-1730BC. It is suggested that this barrow was used for burial. However, due to the large amounts of robbing that occurred, as well as Wilmot's trench that ran through it, it is hard to gain more useful evidence from the barrow itself. One of the most fascinating aspects of our excavation at Boltby was the continuous revaluation of the site and its possible meaning. The senior team of excavators were instrumental in helping with the understanding of a site, and reinforced of my personal belief that the best interpretations are often made on site with the primary evidence. In each end of day debriefing there was always a new and exciting possibility for us to examine the next day, in a site that could continuously change. Fuelled on tea and cakes from various quarters, and the variety added by various odd hats chosen to be worn by Maximilian O'Keeffe, those of us lucky to excavate at Boltby scar will remember it for a long time to come.





Figure 3 – The excavation team at Boltby Scar 2011. (Image Copyright – Rawlins-Welburn)

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### Further reasearch

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## 4 Ben Elliott Interview

**Khadija McBain** (<mailto:secretary@theposthole.org>)

Ben Elliott is a PhD student with a particular interest in Star Carr, antler working and the Mesolithic period in particular. He will be familiar to many from Theory seminars in Year 1.

Post Hole Secretary Khadija McBain conducted this interesting and revealing interview with Ben in December 2011.

**Khadija McBain** – Right so most important question first obviously, which is the best/cheapest pub to go to after lectures/seminars to ‘talk’ about essays, seminar topic and all that good stuff?

**Ben Elliott** – Well the cheapest and easiest is undoubtedly The Donkey, although I am not a massive fan of the atmosphere, to be honest; it is a bit too light and the chairs wobble. Lots of people do love the Lamb and Lion, but personally I find it a bit pricey and a faff to find anywhere decent to sit. If you can get in early enough and they have seats, I would have to say that the Guy Fawkes is the best place for thinking, so I think they would get my vote in an ideal world.

**KM** – Can you tell us about your PhD and what it entails? How are you finding it?

**BE** – My PhD is looking at the use of antler in the British Mesolithic, and trying to place antler-working practices into the wider context of more general human/deer relations. It has involved visiting museums of all shapes and sizes up and down the country, and using a technique called *traceology* to identify and record the ways in which Mesolithic antler artefacts have been manufactured. I have had lots of fun, rooting around in museum stores and working with material that is very rarely put on public display due to its fragmentary nature and the general under-representation of the Mesolithic within British museums. It has also involved a bit of international travel, attending conferences in Spain and Holland and also being trained in methods of analysis in Paris.

**KM** – Why study the Mesolithic? Gordon Childe more or less said there was nothing to report in this period!

**BE** – Precisely for that reason really! As an undergraduate, I was really excited by the lack of work that had been carried out on the Mesolithic, and felt that it was much more accessible for me because I could make a real contribution to academic thinking through my dissertation. So, in a weird way, the neglect by previous academics actually encouraged me. As I have continued my research though, I think I see the Mesolithic as epitomising many of the challenges that other periods of archaeological enquiry face. I also think that it has a specific relevance to many of the issues that British society is dealing with today. I think of the Mesolithic as a huge challenge in terms of understanding the past, understanding people in the past and communicating that understanding to people in the present, and it is that challenge that motivates me and makes me want to make sense of it.

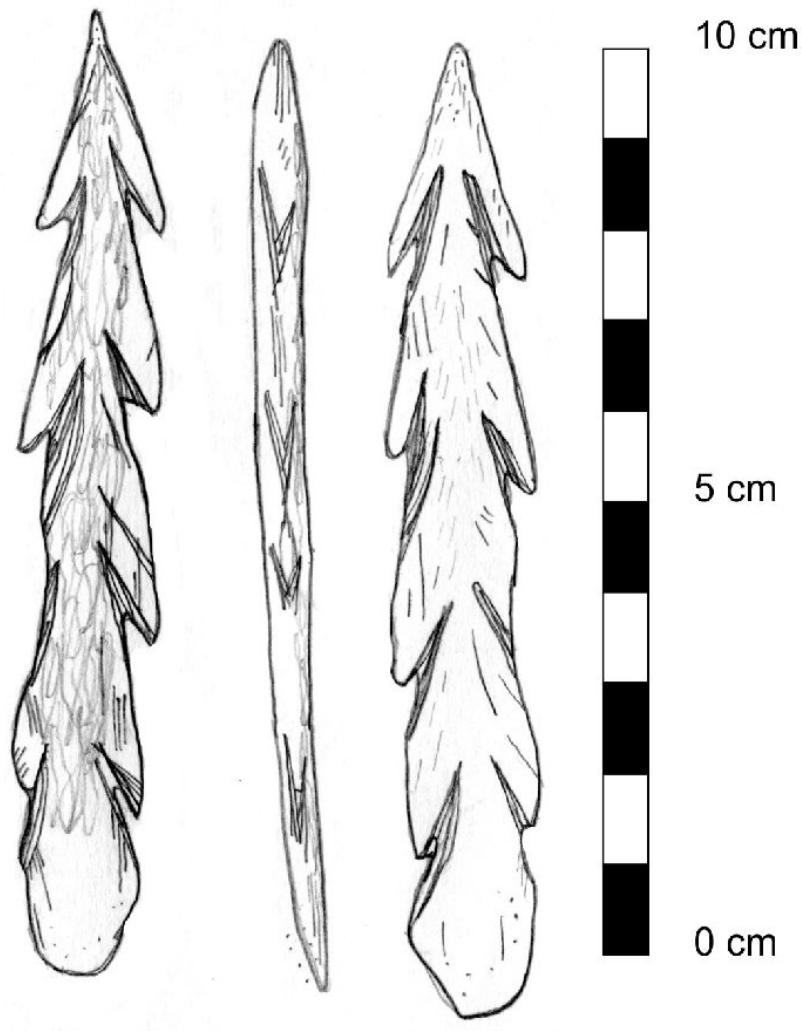
**KM** – Fieldwork are you a lover or a hater, because so many archaeology students are split in their opinion.

**BE** – Lover! Very much a lover. I like being outside and not stuck in front of a computer. I like finding stuff. I like camping.

**KM** – So what is going on with Star Car at the moment and what are the long term plans for the site? Are there plans for fieldwork in the 2012?

**BE** – That is a big question, and not one I am 100% sure I am qualified to answer. There is a definite plan for fieldwork next year, but quite what we end up doing after going through all of the legislative, logistical and bureaucratic procedures needed to dig at the site is anybody's guess. All I can really say is watch this space, and anybody who is interested in the project should keep a close eye on the departmental website for any announcements in the next few months.

## HL 188 MacArthur's Cave



*Figure 1 – Drawing of an antler artefact from MacArthur's Cave, Scotland. (Image Copyright Ben Elliott)*

**KM** – If music was allowed during fieldwork, what would be appropriate?

**BE** – Something instrumental and electronic. I would go with Bonobo or some of the Blueprint remixes. Something that helps you think, because you need to be thinking when you are digging. Or The Specials, because they are always appropriate.

**KM** – Why did you choose to pursue a PhD? What experience have you acquired since you started? Where do you see your research heading next?

**BE** – I chose to apply for a PhD because I really enjoy research and finding stuff out about the past. I thought I had a good question, and that there was a lot of material sat in museum stores that could really tell us something new about the Mesolithic. In terms of experience gained, that is a very difficult thing to quantify and explain. I think I know a lot more about how academia works (or does not work) than when I started, but know very little about the world beyond academia. In terms of the immediate future of my research, I am trying to get my thesis finished and submitted in the next 12 months, and also begin to get some of my findings out to a wider audience through conference presentations and journal publications. I am also very much looking forward to working with the good people of the Star Carr team again in the next few years, who are the best. I hope one day to take my research on people and animal materials further with a post-doc position, but as to when and where that might be I have no idea as yet!

**KM** – Do you have any advice for students thinking about pursuing a PhD? Who are the best people to speak to? Do you think it is ever too early to start thinking about a PhD?

**BE** – Yeah, I do think that it can be a bit early to start thinking about a PhD you certainly should not worry about it in the first year of your degree. I started thinking about one day doing a PhD in my second year, but imagined it might be something I did later on, perhaps after retiring. I spoke to my dissertation supervisor about this and was advised to improve my marks if I wanted to have the opportunity later on in life! It was only during my MA course that I began to seriously consider applying for a PhD. I think my advice to anybody thinking about doing a PhD is to talk to as many informed people as possible about it and get their honest opinions. Work out what it is that you want to do, and where the best opportunities are going to be for you to go and do it. If you are serious about it and have something specific in mind, then it may be worth looking beyond York and that is something that only well-informed advice can really guide you on.

**KM** – Will ever you get use to being called Dr Elliott?

**BE** – I will have to finish my thesis first!

**KM** – How useful do you think ethnography is, especially in regards to the Mesolithic?

**BE** – Ethnography is really useful, although I think its miss-application in the past has generated all sorts of problems for Mesolithic studies. I think a real, critical distinction needs to be drawn between direct and indirect analogies, and it is always worth thinking about why a particular ethnographically-supported argument is so persuasive. However, I firmly believe that a wider reading of ethnographic research, along with a general interest in the people around us today, leads to a better and more rounded understanding of people in the past.



Figure 2 – Mesolithic antler tool. (Image Copyright Ben Elliott)

**KM** – Were gender roles defined at Star Carr? Or do archaeologists still lack enough archaeological material to make these distinctions yet?

**BE** – I think Star Carr would have been a pretty unusual place if people were not expressing or defining their own genders at the site. Whereas some previous discussions have tried to identify male/female gender divisions within the archaeological record at Star Carr, I am far more interested in the way that animal genders may have been experienced and articulated at the site. I think certainly there are clear differences in the ways that people treat the remains of the three species of deer at Star Carr, and these could very well correspond to different suites of interactions with different species to result in the development and negotiation of separate animal identities.

**KM** – Now you are a TV star, do you think your appearance on *Digging for Britain* will continue an open dialogue regarding the question of interactions between humans and animals, not only in the Mesolithic but in other periods as well?

**BE** – Well I would hope so, but I am not sure that 30 seconds on TV will really achieve that! I think that lots of the questions that I am examining with my research at the moment have further implications for later (and earlier) periods, and I am fascinated by the role that technology can play in mediating and articulating human/animal relationships more generally. However, I think that these discussions will be better fuelled (within the academic community) through publication of my research and sharing my thoughts at conferences.

**KM** – Teaching or research?

**BE** – Both please.

**KM** – And finally, are you still eating Danish pastries in lectures?

**BE** – Compulsively!

This interview took place in December 2011. Given the recent news about Star Carr getting a grant of 1.5m Euros, Khadija sent Ben a brief further question. . .



**KM** – What does the recent EU grant mean for Star Carr and the research team?

**BE** – The EU grant is fantastic news for Star Carr, and for Mesolithic studies at York. Not only is it going to mean a new phase in the excavation of the site, but it is also going to allow some of the top researchers in Europe to be based in York and work on the project. This grant can really help to establish York's place as a hub for Mesolithic studies within Britain, and also on a global scale.

For more information on Star Carr, visit the official website. <http://www.starcarr.com/>

## 5 Graveyard Survey – The ‘Lost Art’ of Fieldwork?

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During the summer field schools of the University of York Archaeology department, between 2007 and 2010, Year 1 students were taught how to conduct a graveyard survey. This often involved the participation of PhD and Year 2 students as supervisors and worked to the methods pioneered by the former department lecturer Harold Mytum in his book *Recording and Analysing Graveyards* (Mytum, 2000). Memorials at Easingwold church was recorded between 2007 and 2009, with Heslington completed in one summer project, that of 2010. The former is now part of the North Yorkshire Graveyards Survey project, while the latter will be added soon.

Sadly, in the reorganisation of fieldwork undertaken for the 2010/11 student intake, graveyard survey is no longer taught to Year 1 students at York. This is unfortunate as it inspired a number of current Year 3 students, who learned the techniques in 2010, to choose the subject for their dissertations, myself included. Here I will outline some of the history of the subject, the techniques, my own experiences of dissertation fieldwork and some potential problems of the discipline.

Harold Mytum was not the first to outline the principles of graveyard survey; Burgess (1963) laid some of the groundwork, taking the discipline away from its roots in the art history movement for the first time. He was followed by Jones (1976) who drew up the first ‘instruction manual’ which was at the time aimed mainly at genealogists and local history groups. Mytum built upon these to produce his own work (2000) and has also written extensively on the subject in other books and journal articles since the 1990s. He is not the lone authority in the field however, with Sarah Tarlow producing strong work studying graveyards in the Orkney Islands (Tarlow, 1999) and such publications as that by Dethlefsen and Deetz (1966) looking at American cemeteries.

For my own survey I chose a church reasonably local to me; St. Helen’s in the village of Skipwith, North Yorkshire. It is an area where I do a lot of volunteer archaeology work with a local group, the Friends of Skipwith Common.

This area has an interesting background, with the common hosting man-made remains dating from the Bronze Age to World War 2, and most significant periods in between also present in some form (Blythe and Quartermaine, 2008). The site of the church itself had a limited archaeological survey carried out in 2008 when rebuilding work was done on the tower, allowing archaeologists a rare chance to dig under and around the church as well as looking at the building in general. The survey produced evidence of burials from the Saxon period, reused Roman stonework in the church fabric, a Viking depiction of the Ragnarok legend carved into stonework in the inner tower and twenty-four reused Medieval cross slabs (grave covers) lining the outer perimeter wall (Hall *et al.* 2008); hence a site with a long and complex history.

Having sought and received permission from the local Reverend to do the survey and established that there are 375 external grave markers in the churchyard, I decided to use GPS to locate them on a plan. Having borrowed the equipment and used it to plot in the various stones, I discovered that partly due to operator

error (me) and the unsuitability of that particular type of GPS unit for such detailed work, the results were unable to be used. I then decided, in consultation with my dissertation supervisor, that measuring in the 375 markers using tape survey and plotting the measurements into an AutoCAD drawing programme was the way forward.



Figure 1 – Old headstones (Image Copyright – Mark Simpson)

First though, I needed to identify each stone. Using the standard form available in *Recording and Analysing Graveyards* (Mytum 2000, 81) I began recording the inscriptions and major details of the grave markers. These included a unique reference number (001-375), details of the condition of the stone, the height, width and the length (for flat ledger slabs and chest tombs) or thickness (for standard headstones). The orientation for the vast majority was an east/west alignment, with just a handful differing from this for various reasons. Also recorded was the type of memorial, from a pre-set series of codes and styles (Mytum, 2000), any additional decorations and the style/font of lettering used. I decided not to record material types (as I know little about geology) and inscription techniques, as neither of these would prove useful to the direction of my dissertation research. One of the best things about the Mytum system though is that it leaves the recorder free to include or exclude whichever data their particular survey is interested in (Mytum, 2000).

Once this phase of the fieldwork was complete, the next could begin. In my case, this was the photography section. For this I purchased a small blackboard and chalks from the Early Learning Centre in York (a bargain at £6) and had created for me by my father a simple 20cm scale bar. I was also able to borrow a two metre ranging pole from my local volunteer group, though I only used this when photographing the larger memorials.

Thus equipped I was ready to begin. The Site Code (SK11) was chalked onto the blackboard, along with the memorial number and an arrow showing North. This was then placed alongside or in front of the memorial, with the scale bar and, if used, the ranging pole, and the photograph taken (see Figure 2).



*Figure 2 – Headstone with scale bar and blackboard (Image Copyright – Mark Simpson)*

A number of factors made this a slower process than expected. Limited camera battery life, even at fully charged, meant I could only photograph around 90 memorials at a time. Another unexpected problem was long grass. Four different people cut the grass at St. Helen's, and each does their own area differently. One likes to keep the grass quite long, which made it difficult to walk through and hard to get a clear view of the inscriptions. I had to return to photograph some a second time, as parts of the blackboard were obscured.

This was eventually completed and I moved on to the final phase of the fieldwork; the tape measure survey to replace the lost GPS data.

Having had a brief refresher on this technique from a department expert, I borrowed some long tape measures and started measuring. This is little different from some of the techniques of buildings survey, which is still part of the field school training programme. A series of baselines are needed, each running off from a known point on a previous baseline and themselves measured to fixed points around the churchyard. From these, measurements are taken for each memorial, the number of measurements depending on the memorial type. For mine I used one measurement to a small memorial (vase or cremation plaque), two to a standard headstone (one at either side) and four to ledger slabs and chest tombs (one to each corner) (see Figure 3). Each set of measurements is taken from a known point on a particular baseline, then a second set is taken from a different point (and sometimes a different baseline). This gives a series of



figures that can then be put into an AutoCAD drawing programme to produce an accurate map of the graveyard.



*Figure 3 – Chest tomb (left) and ledger slab (right) (Image Copyright – Mark Simpson)*

This was the one aspect of the fieldwork I got help with, and even then it took two and a half days to record the figures for all 375 memorials. In all, my fieldwork took me a total of 22 survey days, between the beginning of July and mid October 2011.

Graveyard survey can be a very satisfying experience. It is something that can easily be done alone (though a second person is useful if doing a tape measure survey) and the fieldwork can be managed during the summer break between Years 2 and 3 of a degree.

There are a number of directions from which the research can be tackled. Mine is to look at the social changes taking place in a rural Yorkshire village over the period of the 19th to the early 21st centuries. A friend is looking at the power and status of individuals from the materials used for their memorials, with a particular emphasis on local Coniston slate. Two very different uses of similar data from a similar time period.

I can say from my own point of view that I have enjoyed my dissertation, that the fieldwork was interesting to do, occasional setbacks aside and that I look forward to completing it. A copy has already been requested for lodging in the archive of St. Helen's church.

In conclusion, graveyard survey is very rewarding, whether done as part of a team as the students of 2007 to 2010 did, or individually as I and others in Year 3 have done for our dissertations. For anyone who is interested in learning more, the books produced by Burgess (1963), Jones (1976), Tarlow (1999) and Mytum (2000) can be borrowed from the University of York library services.



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## 6 Masters Advice

**Cath Poucher** (<mailto:cdp501@york.ac.uk>) , **Mike Emra** (<mailto:me5290@york.ac.uk>)

In Issue 19, four current Year 3 students gave a brief outline of their dissertation topics in the hope of helping those in other years still trying to decide what to do. Here two current Masters students on the Historical Archaeology path give similar advice...

### Buildings Archaeology by Cath Poucher

As a renowned ‘buildings nerd’ in the department since my first year of undergraduate, I may be a little biased in writing an objective account of the subject. While the course is certainly a different level of work compared to undergraduate it is fair to say that you get out what you put in. Despite this, pace yourself and plan your time well – the days of leaving essays until the last minute are over. Get a diary and be prepared for ten weeks full of work! Scary as this may sound, many postgraduate students manage a full time MA and hold down a job, but I would advise focussing on getting experience in the field – internships and borrowing survey equipment is by far a better use of time in the long run.

#### Structure

The Masters courses are structured very clearly. An MA in Buildings Archaeology is split into two terms of modules, each term containing:

- One core module – Analysing Historic Buildings in the autumn, and Interpreting Historic Buildings in the spring;
- One option module – this is another degree’s core module, allowing you to broaden your knowledge and specialisations;
- Two skills modules – they do as they say on the tin and allow you to develop your archaeological skills.

The core modules for Buildings Archaeology are lecture based, with the occasional field trip which is always fun but does take up whole days. For these there are two essays; a formative and a summative, both more substantial than those in an undergraduate degree. The options modules are a fantastic way of broadening your skills, but again they have two essays, so be aware of the workload. The recommended option modules are Cultural Heritage Management, Conservation, Landscapes, Medieval Archaeology, and Historical Archaeology. The recommended skills modules are Narrating Our Pasts, Topographical Survey, Buildings Survey, Characterisation (which is new to next year), Legislation and Policy, Geographical Information Systems (GIS), Virtual Reality Modelling, and Conservation Solutions, each with some form of assessment. This assessment, along with your essays and possible presentations (depending on your chosen option module) make for a great deal of work, and shows the need for excellent time management and a calm head!

#### Problems

The main problems that could be faced are choosing your option modules. It is vital that you choose your modules based on where you want to go with your

future career. For example, if you want to work in the public representation and heritage of buildings then Cultural Heritage Management is a good choice. Work in the conservation and preservation of buildings would lead you to choose Conservation. It is really important that you understand the modules and what they contain, so talk to a Masters student (such as myself) to understand what would be best for you.

The second problem is attributed to workload. The skills modules can be full days or sometimes two at a time. When you have a presentation and two essays to do, this can seem like too much. The only way of overcoming this is to manage your time well, and pick the right skills for you, which will make the sacrifice more bearable.

The only thing left to say is good luck with your applications, try to take advantage of the survey equipment while here to gain experience, and enjoy it even if it is really stressful!

### **Historical Archaeology by Mike Emra**

Having been an undergraduate at University of York, I knew the Department well; the friendly atmosphere, strong research pedigree, and the academic interests of researchers and staff. I decided to stay because those are the things I wanted out of my continuing Higher Education, and the city of York was very much the type of place I wanted to live.

I chose to pursue a Masters degree because it is an essential stepping-stone to a career in Academia, for whatever reason I wish to pursue it. I feel that we, as students of the past, are enabled to understand it to a greater extent than the wider public purely because we have the time to devote to stratigraphy, wear-use patterns and documentary archives. But what is that knowledge without being shared? One of York's strengths is in collaboration, within the academy and with the community, and as a socially minded archaeologist (as we all should be) I wanted to be part of that dynamic knowledge exchange.

I have found, in the term or so I have been a Masters student here, that I am not just studying Historical Archaeology as my enrolment suggests. I am studying landscapes, buildings, artefacts, computer technology, cultural heritage management and community engagement. The modular structure means I am constantly in contact with other sub-disciplines, and people who come from different backgrounds and viewpoints. That diversity drives excellent teaching, learning and research; it is the absolute cornerstone of holistic archaeological approaches, and has been one of the defining characteristics of my study at York.

This has benefited no doubt from York's position as something of a research crossroads. It is a major centre for all three wings of archaeological practice Humanities, Science and Cultural Heritage, and cross-pollination is inevitable and welcome.

One year is not a lot of time to do this in, though. There is substantial work, and with that substantial pressure. Not just for the presentations, essays and assessments you are obliged to complete, but because, for me, I am in an intermediary phase there is pressure to be outstanding, unique and different. This should not deter anyone wishing to pursue higher education further, because no one should be surprised it is hard work certainly no-one will tell you it is not.

Just as with moving from first to second year, and second to third the workload, and the expectation increases, and so does your ability. You adjust.

Being able to keep up is about being engaged. York has to be the right place for you personally, and academically. It has to be offering what you are interested in, but the Department must also be interested in what you can offer. Despite its diversity York cannot be all things to all men, as nothing really can. But versatility, and being multi-skilled is, I feel, all the more important in these difficult economic climes, and is only going to be increasingly so. As an archaeologist who has consistently plucked from the schmorgasboard offered at York, I can see how one thing flows into the other, how concepts and themes intermingle, and I feel that is a valuable tool for a credible researcher, and probably for commercial practice too.

## 7 An Etiquette Guide to... Lectures and Seminars

Khadija McBain (mailto:secretary@theposthole.org)

The first in a series of etiquette guides for students of all years, on a number of University and Archaeological subjects.

Right, so a little guide on the etiquette of lectures and seminars in no particular order.

1) So it is a very interesting 2 hour lecture... no matter how desperate you are do not put your hand up to ask a question unless the lecturer actually *asks* if there are any *genuine* questions... (during the coming years you will work out the difference between polite and genuine).

2) It is not a good idea to stroll into a 2-hour lecture late and not even be embarrassed or discrete about it. If you insist on being late *at least wait until the break*.

3) We are all late to lectures, it happens. But when it does happen it is common protocol to take the first available seat (do not have the audacity to look for a decent seat at the back), look ashamed (look at the lecture slides and not the lecturer). Adopt the late-to-lecture “embarrassed panther” walk. Plus remember: everybody *WILL* be looking at you.

4) If you have been out the night before and have made the stoical decision to go your lecture (you will be rewarded with applause from your housemates), do not sit in the line of the lecture’s vision. You will get a personal lecture for two hours – you will not be able to shut your eyes, or yawn, BUT you will have to retain a fixed look of fascination on you face. However if you have found a good spot at the back, take this advice from a lecturer: ‘you at the back if you are going to fall asleep in one of my lectures, do not fall asleep wearing a white hat’. Avoid bright coloured clothing!

5) Lectures not only provide you with intellectual stimulation (to impress your parents with and justify the tax payers’ money), but will also provide you with a very strong immune system. Because it just takes one sneeze from one person and everyone has a cold. Coughers, if you insist on attending the lecture please *please* make the best effort to hold your cough. It is hard (we have all been there), but coughers get on everyone’s nerves – please sit this lecture out.

6) People who sit on the end seats in lectures – move up, seriously!

7) Seminars – the most intense hour of your life where three groups emerge: the mouthy lot who always have something to say; the some-timers who raise really good points but do not speak for another two weeks; and lastly the quiet lot who either just do not care or are painfully shy.

8) Seminars – *if you have not done the reading*:

- Do not panic! (Unless you are specifically picked out. Then you are probably screwed).
- Try not to make it too obvious you have no idea what the discussion is about, and act as if you were just about to interrupt somebody with a clever point. Fold your arms and nod, but not too much – just enough to suggest you understand what is going on.
- Hope the mature student has done the reading for the whole class.



- Pretend to write lots of notes, try not to make eye contact with the seminar leader it is harder than it sounds!
- When there is a deadly silence after a question is raised look around the class or at the window and hope somebody cracks and says something (*anything*) before the silence lingers there is only so much tension one can take.
- Do not ask the seminar leader to repeat the question because you do not understand; you will get caught out!
- Do not go to the toilet – too obvious!

– *if you have prepared for the seminar:*

- Do your duty for student-kind and speak when it gets awkward. Even better, speak *before* it gets awkward -no one will think you are a teacher's pet, your fellow students will be eternally grateful.
- Try and create an argument by disagreeing to points most people agree with – everybody loves a good shouting match. *But* make sure you can actually back it up, you will look stupid otherwise!
- Do not dominate.
- Do not show contempt for the seminar leader's research topic you will be on their hit list and the talk of the town.

9) Do not fall asleep in seminars! It is just a bad look. But if you do happen to fall asleep make sure you are not: a) in the seminar leaders' line of vision; b) sitting next to the seminar leader; or c) near one of the mouthy lot, you will get caught! Right in the middle will do, and push your seat out a little so that the person next to you blocks the lecturer's view of you.

10) If you are lucky you will have a mature student in your seminar. They will have read more than the seminar leaders and break every potential silence. If you have more than one mature student: LUCKY! You will probably be able to get away without doing any reading you will be set for the term.

## About The Post Hole

The Post Hole is a student run journal for all those interested in archaeology. It aims to promote discussion and the flow of ideas in the department of Archaeology for the University of York and the wider archaeological community. If you would like to get involved with the editorial process, writing articles or photography then please get in touch via email – (<mailto:editor@theposthole.org>).