

5 Archaeology North Duffield

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The following item is intended to chart developments since I last reported to The Post Hole in October 2010 (Issue 13).

I feel that I should just reflect on that earlier item by setting the scene.

Archaeology North Duffield was formed two years ago within the structure of North Duffield Conservation and Local History Society. Up until that time, research within the Society had been entirely document based and had resulted in the publication of a history pamphlet entitled 'Ducks Crossing' which proved very popular locally. The title was inspired by two signs warning drivers, unsuccessfully, of the likelihood of ducks commuting the main street.

Since then there has been both good and bad news. The private pond has sadly become the victim of the never-ceasing search, by developers, for land upon which to build. However, the new, more up-to-date and extensive local history book is in the last stages of preparation and will shortly be presented to the printer.

I should begin by briefly discuss the chronology of events in terms of the archaeology, which I touched on in the last article. The first significant event was four years ago when my wife cajoled me into relaying the patio. In the process I chose to excavate a further six inches or so beneath the old bedding level and unearthed a number of pieces of sundry metal and modern potsherds but, crucially, a piece of pottery which I immediately recognised as Roman grey ware. Whilst this was exciting, it may have been deposited here from somewhere else during the construction of the bungalow. I had already unearthed numerous pieces of metalwork, harness fittings and a terret ring and suchlike when gardening. It did, however, prompt me to request the crop mark transitions for North Duffield. These showed two large complexes of crop marks to the North East of the village which included Iron Age hut circles and another complex to the West with isolated smaller features scattered about, mainly to the South.

The group was then invited by York Archaeological Trust (YAT) to investigate why crop marks appear on the sands and gravels but seldom on the clays and silts or alluvium of the 25 foot drift.

Last time I reported that field-walking and geophysical investigation had commenced. The first field we walked, to the North East of the village, resulted in much of local historical interest but little, if anything, of archaeological importance being found. In fact, of the 941 catalogued items recovered, three were medieval green glaze and one piece of Northern gritty ware. The remainder were Post Medieval/Modern potsherds including five pieces of Slipware. This field was mainly sands and gravels, with some clay areas but right on the edge of the alluvium of the Lower Derwent Valley floodplain.

The second field was to the South of the village on the clays and silts. Here we started to get some interesting results. Of the 1115 catalogued 'finds' recorded, 140 were Medieval green glaze pottery sherds, 39 were Northern gritty ware and there were 16 pieces of what appear to be Roman grey ware. These will shortly be examined by a professional pot expert to confirm my initial identification or otherwise of course! This field was only partially walked with one third remaining to be walked in October/November 2011.

We were assisted in the field-walking by students from York University, Doctor Jon Kenny of YAT, members of other history/archaeology groups as well as our own AND members. We also received the most enthusiastic assistance of North Duffield Community Primary School pupils and teachers who gave good impressions of a horde of locusts and, when ‘finds’ washing, confirmed their ability to wash the Humber Bridge from end to end in two hours flat.



Figure 1 – Children from North Duffield school fieldwalking (Image Copyright – Archaeology North Duffield)

Neither of these fields showed any indications of crop marks other than ridge and furrow, now ploughed out.

Two other fields have been walked; one to the South, again on clays and silts and one to the West centred on one complex of crop marks.

Both fields resulted in similar ‘finds’ recovered to the earlier ones. The overall picture from field-walking is continuous occupation in the village from the Norman Invasion through to modern times. What is not yet clear is whether the Roman pottery finds can be attributed to Roman residency in the village or possession of traded Roman wares by the local tribes.

We also received training from Jon Kenny in resistivity surveying and conducted a survey of the village green to try to understand a steep lump of some ten feet across on the green in an essentially flat landscape. This resulted in some anomalies becoming apparent.

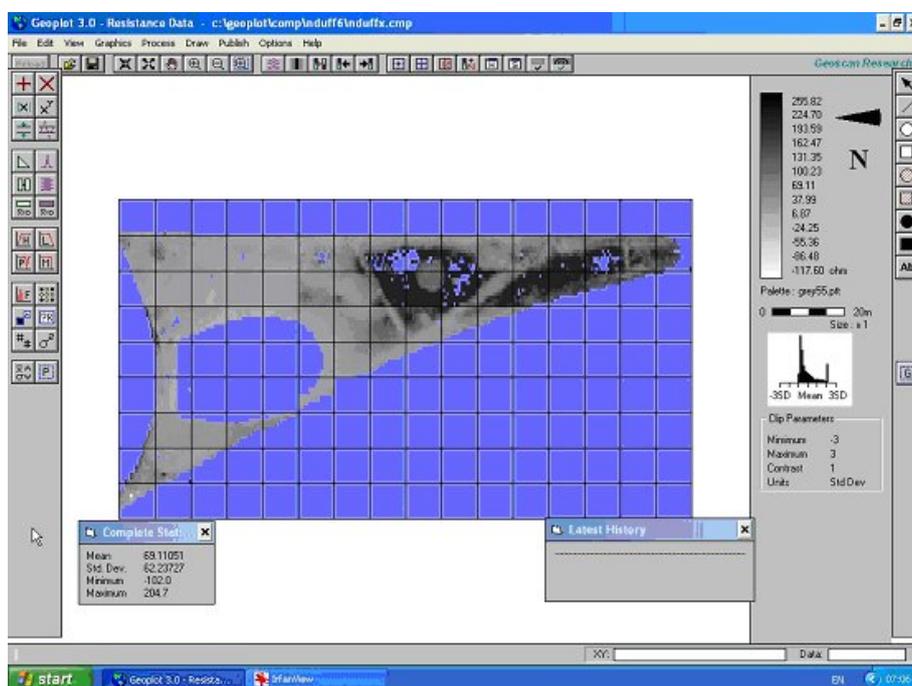


Figure 2 – Resistivity on the village green (Image Copyright – Archaeology North Duffield)

Whilst all this was taking place, an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF)-My Heritage, was made. I am delighted to say that our application was successful and we were granted £25,700 to fund a three-year Historic Landscape Project. With our input of match funding from volunteer hours and other non-cash contributions, the Project is worth £42,000.

In this Project we committed to more fieldwork to drive targeted excavation of any features found or suspected, a test-pit survey of the village, interaction with the local primary school to deliver Iron Age based material and workshops built around the National Curriculum (history) to include the reconstruction of an Iron Age roundhouse, a history fair and historical re-enactment event based on the Romano British period, a final conference and lecture event to report our findings and conclusions and the preparation of academic journal reports and a booklet for sale locally.

Early in 2011, we started to plan the Big Village Dig 2011. The event was accepted into the Council for British Archaeology, Festival of British Archaeology, and fixed for the weekend of 16/17th July 2011. Numerous villagers volunteered a 1x1m area of their gardens, including the local school.

I prepared a Methodology and Context Card for the event and Hannah Baxter of YAT produced a document to allow the Context Card to be properly completed. It was important to ensure that the work we were doing fitted standard excavation protocols whilst allowing participants to have fun and enjoy digging their own test-pits. We received over 25 offers of test-pits with roughly half of them able to do their own digging under supervision. We decided to dig the pits in 20cm spits using each spit as a context but being aware of any evidence of context change in the usual ways and, at that point, recording separate contexts.

I decided to use the offer of test-pits by the school as a way of testing the voracity of the methodology to give me time to make any changes necessary for the bigger event. I also made up an excavation pack of all the documents, advice sheets and materials and tools required to complete the 'dig'. Thus the Big School Dig (BSD) 2011 took place on 23rd June.

The children dug three test-pits in the school playing field protected from the rain by gazebos we had acquired. Each test-pit encountered 'natural' around 60cms deep. We used one class of thirty 9/10 year olds in the morning and a similar sized class of 8 year olds in the afternoon. The classes were split into two groups; one group to dig and one group to wash what was found. At half time they changed places. Four or five children to a pit were supervised by an archaeologist and a teacher. Several days later I returned to the school to tell them exactly what they had found.

This activity aroused the interest of the teacher in the reception class (5 year olds), so myself and another member of AND salted some unstratified items from my collection in their sandpit for them to excavate.

These two events were an unmitigated success, so much so that they will be repeated each year for successive classes of local children.

The weekend of the BVD arrived with ominous weather predictions of torrential rain. We again borrowed the gazebos and a large marquee we used for the Dig HQ. The local pub landlord put on sandwiches at lunch time both days. 13 test-pits were dug over the weekend, the most we could manage; two were on the village green, one in the pub garden and the rest in residents' gardens. The event also attracted a lot of schoolchildren whose newly found expertise was put to good use.



Figure 3 – All help gratefully accepted! (Image Copyright – Archaeology North Duffield)

My approach to York University through the kind auspices of Dr Cath Neal resulted in a number of students volunteering to help over the weekend. Three members of YAT were in attendance, members of AND, both experienced diggers and others, and we had a number of visitors assisting including a mother and son who travelled all the way from Huddersfield. So thanks to Amie, Ruby, Tessa, Danielle, Richard and not to forget Mark Simpson.

Two pits produced masses of pottery and clay pipe stems etc, suggesting that we had 'hit' the core of the village. The further away from this 'core', the more it was clear we were excavating 'plough soil' rather than undisturbed contexts. One pit, excavated by my son and myself, resulted in the removal of a square metre of builders' rubbish, plastic, bits of wood etc. At the end of the second day we encountered the original grass surface with the grass clearly visible. So, at 1m depth, the 'dig' really begun! One pit discovered a Victorian outside midden with a drain leading to a cesspit the householder thought was a well.

Both these events, BSD and BVD, confirmed the field-walking results of continuous occupation from the 11th century and the increasing number of Roman finds suggest that we had Romans living amongst us 1600 years ago. Our metal detectorist, who attended both events, has been working quietly away over the last two years and recovered 15 Roman coins all from one field, that had already attracted my attention prior to his finds. These coins all date to the end of the Roman occupation of Britannia, late 4th/early 5th centuries. I hope to walk that field later this season or in 2012 and to carry out both resistivity and magnetometry to investigate an intriguing 'platform' at the edge of a sandy ridge.

So ends the first part of the three year project. We have established a chronology of occupation, probably from Roman times and we are likely to have established part of the core of the village. We certainly have achieved some of our stated aims of encouraging local people to engage with and take responsibility for their local heritage. We have introduced a wide spectrum of local people to archaeology and created a good working relationship between the professionals and the amateurs.

There is still a great deal of work to be done. We at Archaeology North Duffield appreciate the advice and assistance we have been given and the opportunity to advance our knowledge of the local area is exciting the interest of more and more people. Clearly, the support of Jon Kenny and his staff is crucial to whatever success we may have achieved. The support and encouragement of Cath Neal, Steve Roskams and the students of the Department of Archaeology is greatly appreciated.

This season of field-walking is now upon us as we await a dry period to work in. We have plans to excavate test trenches over known crop marks to establish identification of the features, test the hypothesis of coverage by Aeolian Sands and to recover dating evidence through the winter. We welcome volunteers from all sectors of the community both academic and locally. We are collecting information upon building the roundhouse and sourcing, wherever possible, local timber and reeds. It seems to me that, with the financial restraints placed upon us by the recession, the future of archaeological investigation relies ever more heavily upon community and therefore voluntary involvement.

If you would like to know more about us visit our website at www.ndchs.org.uk (<http://www.ndchs.org.uk>) . There are links therein should you wish to know more or volunteer to assist our work. My contact details are

ndchs@talktalk.net (<mailto:ndchs@talktalk.net>) and we would love to hear from you.

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