

9 Growing as an Archaeologist at Hungate

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The Hungate excavation, run by York Archaeological Trust (YAT), was the first dig that I had been on prior to starting a Historical Archaeology undergraduate degree at the University of York. Since the dig was here in the centre of York, I had the privileged opportunity to continue to be a part of the excavations throughout my time at university. I believe that my time spent at Hungate has helped me to develop as an archaeologist, and as a person. From learning the basic archaeological excavation techniques and teaching others those same skills to working with people of all ages and backgrounds; commercial archaeologists, finds and faunal remains specialists, older people who have had a lifelong interest in archaeology, young people considering studying archaeology at university, as well as other students. I have truly enjoyed everything which I have done at Hungate and I have made some really good friends.

Summer 2009, before University

In year 13, I had applied to universities wanting to study History or Archaeology at various institutions. After being offered a conditional place at them all, I took the decision to visit the universities before I made my choice. The University of York captured my attention, and I felt like I had the best responses from the lecturers, who were approachable and enthusiastic; I also liked both the campus and King's Manor, so York became my first choice. I did not know all that much about archaeology, other than what I had read in university prospectuses or books, and watching documentaries. So my friend Megan, who was also going to do archaeology at a different university, and I decided to go on the *Archaeology Live!* training excavation at Hungate in September before our universities' terms started. Hopefully I would actually like archaeology, seeing as I was committing to a three year degree course.

Megan had already dug before; she had been at Hungate the previous year, as well as undertaking year 10 work experience at an archaeological company, but I was a tad nervous. What if I messed up whatever I was digging? Previously I had wanted to be a vet, but I had worried that I would accidentally kill the animals instead of saving them. At least everything is already dead if you are an archaeologist! Obviously, that was not my only reason for applying for archaeology; I had always been a bit of a history and geography geek, so archaeology seemed perfect. I knew that it would not be like Indiana Jones or Lara Croft, but what about the slightly less ridiculous and less dramatic TV show *Bonekickers*? They did Time Team-like excavations, had a proper lab and everything. I knew it was not really going to be like that at all, but the part about always going to a pub afterwards, I quickly came to realise is actually true.

We were staying in Halifax College on the University of York campus with other trainees and some placements. Armed with some new steel toe capped boots, a shiny new trowel and digging clothes, I turned up to site on the first day looking forward to the week ahead. Everyone starting that week had to have an induction that morning from Site Director, Toby Kendal. This included health

and safety on and off site, a general history of Hungate, what had been found so far, and how the site is recorded using single context recording.

Below is a typical week at *Archaeology Live!*. I think the way in which the training dig is organised is very good. Trainees get to experience lots of different aspects of archaeological excavations.

Timetable	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
9.00 – arrive					
9.30 – first session	Induction	Excavation	Excavation	Excavation	Matrix Lecture
10.45 – break					
11.00 – second session	Induction	Pottery Talk	Conservation Labs	Small Finds Talk	Environmental Sample Processing
12.30 – lunch					
1.00 – third session	Finds washing	Finds bagging	Excavation	Excavation	Excavation
2.30 – break					
2.45 – fourth session	Excavation	Excavation	Excavation	Environmental Sample Washing	Excavation + site tour at 4.30
5.00 – finish	Pub	Pub	Pub	Mini tour of York	BBQ at Hungate

Figure 1 – Typical trainee timetable. (Image Copyright – Sarah Drewell)

When we went out on to site, kitted out with hard hats, steel toe-capped boots, gloves and high-visibility (hi-vis) vests (if you are not wearing all four of these things, and full length trousers, then you are not allowed on site), we were split up in to three groups, each with a supervising commercial archaeologist. Elena was the supervisor for Megan and me. Under Elena were various placements, which were each given two trainees, and would act as a middle person bridging the gap between the supervisors and the trainees. Megan and I were placed together with a girl called Katie, who was studying archaeology at the University of Liverpool. Then, with the other trainees in Elena's group, we trowelled back an area to see whether there was any archaeology there, and to get us used to using a trowel.

After we had trowelled back the whole area, we were then taken by our placements to the feature that we would be working on. Katie, Megan and I would be excavating and recording a Viking pit.

The fact that I got the opportunity to work on a feature right from the start – uncovering it, excavating and defining it, through to planning and photographing it – was a really interesting process, and gave me the opportunity to see all aspects of archaeological fieldwork in regards to that feature. Finds typical to a Viking refuse pit came out of the feature, such as animal bones, which led us to interpret what its function had been.



Figure 2 – Top Left: Trowelling back. Top Right: My Feature – Viking pit. Bottom Left: Excavating the Feature. Bottom Right: Recording the Feature. (Image Copyright – YAT Archaeology Live! 2009)

While I was at Hungate, the Time Team film crew came to get some working shots of the site to put in to the Time Team special show about Vikings, which Hungate featured heavily in.

As well as the opportunity to excavate and record, trainees also had a tour of the YAT Conservation Labs and had talks from both their pottery specialist and their small finds specialist. They also got to do finds processing, including washing finds, learning how to correctly sort and bag bulk finds, and how to process environmental samples. At the end of your time as a trainee at *Archaeology Live!*, you were given a certificate saying that you have completed one/two week(s) on the training dig, as well as the end of week group photo with everyone, and a disk with the site photos, both working shots and records of features, from that week.

There is a social side to the training dig too. After excavation on three of the days, most people go to the pub afterwards. The pub is also known as ‘Theoretical Discussions’ time. On the Thursday evening Toby gave a tour of York, aspects not usually seen by tourists, but where excavations have taken place over the years as well as facts, such as the shops on Walmgate are still following the Medieval plots, for example. Then, every Friday, after a tour of the site, there is a BBQ at the warehouse, which is a pleasant end to the week.

Community Team Volunteer

When it came to the field school at Heslington East in the summer term of first year, I was glad that I had already experienced excavation and knew what to

expect and what I was supposed to be doing. I was invited back to the last Hungate BBQ of the 2010 season, and saw many of the people who had been there the summer before. As I wanted to get more experience, I had got in touch with Jon Kenny, YAT's community archaeologist, and he invited me down to Hungate to meet him. I had a site tour, to see how much it had changed since the last time that I had been there and what features were being excavated at that point in time. The community volunteers had their own section of the site, which they recorded and excavated weekly, on Wednesdays and Thursdays, with supervision from Pam White, YAT's Outreach Coordinator and from Jon on the respective days.



Figure 3 – Some of the Community Team. (Image Copyright – YAT 2010)

The community volunteers were all really welcoming and I enjoyed going most Wednesdays to spend a day excavating with them. Some of the commercial team remembered me from *Archaeology Live!* which was nice, but the community team mainly operated separately. I liked being able to get involved with the excavation, which was a welcome break from all the reading I had to do for various modules. It also kept me up to date with what was happening on site, and increased my archaeological knowledge and experience.

With the community team, I also volunteered on the weeklong community led dig organised by Hannah Baxter in the village of Hessay in October 2011. We were looking for a Roman road in the farmer's field, which we believed we found. On the dig, I was showing people what to do, regarding how to take correct photographs and how to fill out the recording sheets. I realised that one of our volunteers was from the homeless community, who had an interest in archaeology after volunteering on Rachel Kiddey's Bootham Park excavation, and so had to adapt my approach to how I explained the procedures so that it was easier for him to then undertake the paperwork himself.

As well as excavating and recording features, we also did finds processing, as the conditions on site were not always suitable for us to excavate, the site becoming dangerous when it rained.



Figure 4 – Community Team at Hessay opening up a second trench. (Image Copyright – YAT 2010)

Back at Hungate I had the opportunity to help the faunal remains expert, Clare Rainsford, from time to time; cataloguing photos, identifying faunal remains, if they had any pathology, the number of bone fragments in each context, and looking at certain contexts to answer specific questions from the faunal remains present. I was able to put together almost complete skeletons, such as a hare and a piglet, which was good fun. Helping Clare has been really useful, as now I find it much easier to identify what animals/parts of animals I have found when excavating.

Archaeology Live! Summer Placement 2011

In spring 2011 I applied to be a placement on the *Archaeology Live!* summer training excavation. The role of a placement is to assist the supervisors by showing the trainees what to do; excavation, recording, finds processing, sample processing, and anything else relevant. You have to have either been on one of the Archaeology Live! training programmes before, or have archaeological experience including single context recording, of which I had both. Although placements were there to expand their knowledge and experience, we were primarily there to help the supervisors and the trainees; we were there for their benefit.

There were three supervisors, all part of the commercial unit who worked at Hungate normally, who would be supervisors during the 12 weeks of *Archaeology*

Live! 2011. I was placed with Ben, who had three other placements, and we were each assigned two trainees a week. Commercial archaeologists continued to work on site during the training dig. It was surprising how much archaeology I actually knew when it came to explaining things to trainees. Obviously you have to have a good understanding of archaeology yourself, as it is much harder to guide others during excavation and to explain to them how and why. Ben was always around to check on progress and to discuss things with.



Figure 5 – Top Left: Ben explaining something to the trainees (sat on the floor right) and placements. Top Right: Trainees undertaking environmental sampling. Bottom Left: 9th Roman Legion marked CBM. Bottom Right: Roman Coin. (Image Copyright – YAT Archaeology Live! 2011)

The trainees' timetable had not changed since I was a trainee, as it worked so well. Whenever the trainees were inside doing finds washing their corresponding placement would be too. Placements had to attend the talks/lecture sessions once during their time there as well. It is always nice to see the new artefacts in the conservation labs or be reminded of how stratigraphy and matrices work. Often placements had to do other jobs, such as emptying the finds washing barrels of the silt or rearranging the spoil heap for better access, which was never much fun.

With my trainees I worked on recording a Viking sunken feature building, and then recording and excavating some Roman levels/terracing, which had other features cut into it, such as a refuse pit.

Being a placement was a great challenge, and I felt that my confidence in myself and in my archaeological knowledge increased. My trainees seemed to understand what I was talking about, and they all enjoyed their weeks on site, if not the mix of weather. The other placements were all really nice, and as everyone was there for a minimum of a month, you got to know people well.

I have loved being at Hungate!

I would seriously recommend going on the *Archaeology Live!* training programme as it is a fantastic opportunity with a friendly atmosphere and excellent training supervisors. It is such good fun and increases your knowledge of excavation techniques whilst making a lot of friends with the same enthusiasm for archaeology. The great thing about *Archaeology Live!* is you learn by doing, every step of the process is taught by experience, it is not in a classroom or lecture theatre, but on a working commercial site, there is no better way to learn.

For more information check out <http://tinyurl.com/clvd66d> for the 2012 training excavation.



Figure 6 – A photo of everyone is taken each Friday, to have a photographic record (author centre, standing). (Image Copyright – YAT Archaeology Live! 2011)

Special thanks to Site Director Toby Kendall for allowing Sarah to use these images in her article.