

# 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)*