



## Preliminary report 2024

This year's dig was once again led by Kristian Pedersen and began formally on Monday 3rd June extending until Sunday 14th July (although wet weather prevented archaeology on the final 2 days). There were 27 active days but the unpredictable weather meant that some days were truncated. The dig involved two trenches, numbered 8 and 9 and were within the two zones of the Hunting Hall Bottom Dene that have been dedicated to us for a period of 5 years under a new land management scheme established this year that involves a change of use of this field. The larger zone is 2000 sq metres, the smaller one is 500 sq metres.

**Trench 8** penetrated the inner ditch of the double ditch and bank system that surrounds the Iron Age settlement. The objective was to find material that could be used for radiocarbon dating to establish the age of the ditch. This objective was met by the recovery of a large number of butchered cattle bones at the very bottom of the ditch that were submerged in mud and in excellent condition. Three samples from this collection have already been sent to the laboratory at Glasgow University. The report may be several months away.

**Trench 9** was 10m square (100 sq metres) immediately to the south of our previous excavated areas and in the centre of the smaller of our dedicated zones. This area had previously shown marked activity by both geophysical survey and divining and lay very close to the AngloSaxon grave excavated in 2023. The principal objective was to expose the semicircular 'palisade' that the geophysical survey suggested ran through this area. We believe that we have been successful in that an extensive deep and steep sided feature was excavated in the expected position. It was also felt that this area might reveal further graves however this hasn't yet been the case up to the conclusion of the dig. The trench proved to be very complex and there were finds from several periods. These included a possible Neolithic flint, a potential Bronze Age cairn, another probable Iron Age roundhouse hearth, a piece of Romano British ceramic and possible early medieval pottery. We were unable to complete our investigations within the time limit and so we shall return to trench 9 in 2025.

This year all records were kept digitally by Alistair McKenzie and are yet to be analysed.

There were 33 volunteers providing just over 1400 hours of their time. Though a few of our regular volunteers from previous years were not involved this time it was a great pleasure to welcome several new people, some of whom were new to archaeology. We expect them to return next year.

Once again we had a visit from Bailey Green School in Killingworth . The 12 children and 3 members of staff enjoyed a warm sunny day experiencing different aspects of archaeology. Their presence is of mutual benefit.

Post excavation sample analysis in 'GarageLab' will recommence on Monday 9th September.