

## D minus 4 and counting

Hello Everyone,

We've had a couple of very busy days this week in preparation for this year's dig at Hunting Hall Farm. We decided some time ago to revisit trenches 3 to 6 (that is from 2019 - 2022) with the intention of gaining a combined overview of the site and perhaps recover further artefact. The digger has now completed the topsoil removal and there's a huge area to consider in the 4 to 6 weeks we've allowed ourselves but everything is now ready for next week. We know for certain that there's much more to come as we've opened a new area immediately adjacent to what was a highly productive spot last year.

We'll be starting at 10.00 on Monday 15th May and everyone is welcome. No experience is needed, all tools are provided and there's absolutely no need to book. Just turn up and sign the register on arrival. After the first week our normal working week will be Tuesday to Saturday, with Sunday and Monday as rest days and we're usually on site from 10.00 until 16.00 though of course you can arrive or leave at any time. Should there be changes to this schedule, perhaps because of the weather forecast or Kristian's other commitments, they will be announced in my daily dig diary as soon as we are aware. If you've received this email then you'll also get the dig diary at the end of each day to keep you in touch.

We don't have access to the Piggery this year and so if you like a hot drink at lunchtime then a flask will be needed. We have toilet access on site. So all is set. We're looking forward to seeing old friends again and meeting new ones over the next few weeks. If you want any more information then please get back to me.

Hope to see you there.

Paul

### 15th May : Day 1

**The Big Clean Up:** A good number of volunteers out to mark our first day and the photo shows Kristian giving us his objectives and priorities for this year. Without an army of volunteers we won't be able to fully investigate the area but by being selective we should at least be able to form reasonable conclusions before we finish in a few weeks. Our efforts were focused on returning the site to a workable condition by taking up the remaining protective plastic sheet beneath the topsoil that we'd put down at the end of our previous digs. Trowelling also began on our previously uninvestigated area of trench. We also had a visit from archaeologist and Anglo-Saxon expert Roger Miket to give his opinion on what might be an Early Medieval grave. Let's just say it's promising! No finds today and cleaning up will continue tomorrow.



### 16th May : Day 2

**Almost ready:** Clean up is almost complete and all of the buried plastic sheet has now been removed. The process has already revealed two more new pits ready for investigation and Kristian has made a plan for how we shall approach the possible Early Medieval grave. It will involve being very careful I suspect and weather permitting this



process will begin on Tuesday of next week. We've also begun further investigation of the potential boundary 'wall' at the east side of the dig, originally uncovered in 2021 and we shall attempt to find whether it joins a similar structure that we found in 2022.

### 17th May : Day 3

A very productive day with features being cleaned and revealing new small finds including bone, slag, metal and tooth. With a good body of volunteers present we were able to focus on three specific areas of the 'super-trench', these being the area around the possible medieval grave, the large pits around the flagstones/bloomeries (Iron Age kilns for the production of iron) and the newly exposed area which is now giving a positive confirmation of the connectedness of the tumbled walls of season 2021 and 2022. Overall the entire trench is looking remarkable after only 3 days of cleaning and we're well on schedule!



### 18th May : Day 4

A Great day with 15 volunteers and 2 visitors! Progress continues conjoining the 2021/2022 walls and the hope is that once we start to excavate we shall reveal further post holes. The newly opened area has revealed some large stones (pictured) which are slightly to the north-west of our original flagstone area. Although still in the topsoil-interface, a small amount of bone was retrieved. The rest of that area is cleaning well and a piece of slag recovered which was also the case in the southern part of the super trench which is still being cleaned back but giving up small fragments of bone, tooth and slag.



Once again the cleaning effort cannot be underestimated and the progress is fantastic.

Good to see well known friends return today especially as Pauline found a very robust metal object which we shall allow our resident detectorists pronounce on before saying any more.

### 19th May : Day 5

The process of cleaning up the trench (now named as Trench 7 for the purposes of new finds) is almost complete. Today the super trench was manned by the Super Six who continued to

clean back the newly exposed area finding further slag, tooth, bone and a couple of mystery objects, one possibly shot or a musket ball of some type and the other a piece of glazed pottery which looks slightly older than the usual Victorian-



midden material we are used to.

According to our resident metal expert Alistair (my words, not his!), the mystery object in the photo looks pre Industrial Age and may be a stud used on wooden carts or doors. It may even date back as far as the Iron Age but that's rather in hope than expectation. The slag is important because of a direct connection with Iron Age production. The musket ball is the second one we've found and, if it's like the first, may have possibly originated from the Civil War period.



### 20th May : Day 6

With weather more suited to a day building sandcastles on the beach it wasn't the best for archaeology. Today we must thank Kristian for today's report and Carole for today's photo. We continued to clean the trench, which was somewhat difficult because of the dry and sunny weather which resulted in the surface turning into something just short of concrete, and any cultural deposits losing their colour within minutes. Nevertheless, the team made good progress in the difficult conditions, and the stone alignment is being revealed quite well by Carole and Alistair. It now seems that it is a continuous stone alignment that links with that found in last year's trench just adjacent to the flagstone flooring on the eastern margin of the trench. The stone arrangement that was exposed by John Home Robertson yesterday is getting larger, and Byr exposed a concentric feature of burned sandstone abutting to this. All of these seem to be embedded in a cultural deposit replete with charcoal staining. Not many artefacts are emerging just yet, but I am sure that we will be encountering more slag and animal bone before long as we begin to descend. We are just atop the cultural layers that we are interested in and there are lots of indications of activity. Our plan on Tuesday is to move some of the excavation team to the possible burial feature to begin excavation there, and to continue to work on the stone arrangements.



### 23rd May : Day 7

Today has been one of our best days ever. Great weather, possibly a record turnout of volunteers including some returning old friends plus one new one, several small finds and a start made on what may eventually turn out to be our most exciting feature yet; the possible Early Medieval grave. However, the best find of the dig so far (not technically part of the dig but an item found by our own metal detectorist in an area close to our dig site) is a Romano-British loop fastener and is shown in the photo. It's probably from the first century AD and shows some evidence of enamelling. It was probably used to fasten a cloak in the same way we might fasten a duffle coat (does anyone still wear them?). Today we've had finds of bone and ceramic from our 'new' and previously unexplored area with the promise of much more to come. On site tomorrow from 10.00 and we'd love you to join us, even if only for a guided tour!



## 24th May : Dig Diary Day 8

Yet another very pleasant day at the dig and once again we're very grateful to the healthy number of volunteers who turned out. The continued dry spell meant that the day began with soaking the surface of our priority areas using water from the huge container kindly provided and brought to site by Tom. Work continues on the suspected Anglo Saxon grave but it's being given the reverence and extreme patience that it deserves as shown in today's first photo. Using cake decorating tools rather than trowels progress is understandably slow. After two days we've only removed a couple of centimetres of soil but we're still very confident that we're doing the right thing under the circumstances. Investigating a possible grave is unknown territory for most of us. Elsewhere on the site work does go on apace investigating the 'new' area and true to form we're exposing yet more hearths, pits and ditches but their intercutting and overlaying situations suggests they were constructed at very different times.



## 25th May : Dig Diary Day 9

Today we had another great turn-out with some volunteers sticking to the tricky slow-paced effort to ascertain whether we have a grave feature whilst others worked like Trojans in the stony heartlands of the old Trench 6 newly exposed area. Byr and John exposed parallel features in the new area towards the 'wall' replete with animal bone and a particularly nice piece of worked flint whilst Julia and Barbara continued to uncover an unremitting cobbled area which, as yet, is not revealing its true relationship to the earlier excavations in Trench 6 or indeed to the new stone feature in the Supertrench. George and Barry have now sufficiently cleaned enough of last years cobbles (which gave copious amounts of bone and slag) to allow sectioning to proceed.



## 26th May : Dig Diary Day 10

Great weather again today allowing the many volunteers and visitors to make the most of the site. With the new area of Trench 7 cleaned and new features revealed today was a day of taking soil samples from 6 separate areas: some where the features could be readily understood such as the ditches apparent in the southern end of the trench and some which need to be better understood but which are clearly undercutting the surface and representing an earlier phase of the site.



Kristian had the Moasure (Otherwise known as 'The Magic Walking Stick') out today, grappling with new technology like the early adopter he is! This machine is supposed to do all our measurements more efficiently than the Old Skool ways but it's going to take more



practice!

For the first time this year we had the drone in the sky to provide us with our birds-eye view of the site and we look forward to reviewing the images over the next couple of days.

### 27th May : Dig Diary Day 11

Well that's two weeks gone and what a lot we have managed to achieve. We really know our targets now for the remainder of the dig. Our mysterious feature is coming along very well. Our clues so far give a high probability that this is Anglo Saxon although there is still a possibility of this being an Iron Age feature.....we have to keep digging!

Elsewhere, the edges of the ring ditch which surround this feature and which are late Iron Age, have been established; the area in which the larger Iron Age pot sherds were found have been sectioned and in the immediate vicinity a large post hole with bottom-deposit of bone and stone has been revealed.



Our newest recruit, Miss M, along with her mum Pippa, from just outside the village, advanced the project by finding a post-hole at the southern end of the trench where she showed fantastic skills with a trowel for a first time. She also spent time with Alistair learning the 'trade' together with the Dark Arts of metal detecting! We'll set her loose with the divining rods next week!

All in all a very satisfying first two weeks and we're looking forward to a couple of days recuperation before starting up again on Tuesday at 10:00

### 30th May : Dig Diary Day 12



After so many days of suspense we're now certain that we have a grave, probably Anglo Saxon. The main evidence comes from the teeth that have been exposed and we've been fortunate to have had them identified by a dentist as belonging to an individual about 20 years of age. The small sections of bone that we've so far uncovered are badly degraded and proving very difficult on which to work. Metal detecting has shown no evidence of grave goods. We now have the relevant licence that allows us to continue our



archaeology on the feature but we would like to keep the news to

ourselves for the time being. If you would like to come along to see the grave please catch us during our normal working day and we'll be very glad to show you.

More finds of bone and cattle teeth today in our new area together with a very complex area of overlapping ditches and pits. Recording has already begun on one of these but more investigation will be performed.

We had our youngest ever archaeologists on site this morning. The photo shows them being supervised by landowner (and Grandad!) Tom.

### 31st May : Dig Diary Day 13

A very industrious day today with heavy duty work to reveal the extent of our 'wall' that we think may have provided the eastern boundary of our site along the river bank and may also be from the later years of the Iron Age occupation (photo 1). Much more careful work continued in the grave where we've begun to remove the surface of the two remaining quadrants. Some small fragments of bone together with exposing the top surface of what may turn out to be a long bone. The feature seems to be very shallow and at the moment we have no real idea how this job may eventually pan out. We're sure



Today's second photo shows a mystery find. It appears to be a fossil but is very tactile and seems quite 'ergonomic' to handle. Could it be ornamental? Perhaps you have an idea about whether it's natural or has been 'worked'.



### 1st June : Dig Diary Day 14

We've had a reply from our geologist friend Alison Tymon about yesterday's mystery find. Alison tells us that it's coral limestone but that its shape doesn't look natural. If it's been 'worked' then for what reason? Tool or decorative. I'm sure we'll see Alison on site before the end of the

dig and we'll get a more definitive identification. Work has continued around the site today under cool and grey skies revealing several new significant features. One of these is a very deep posthole that contains a couple of cattle bones in the 'fill' (photo 1). Deliberate we'll never know but this substantial posthole is one of several along the line of the 'wall'.



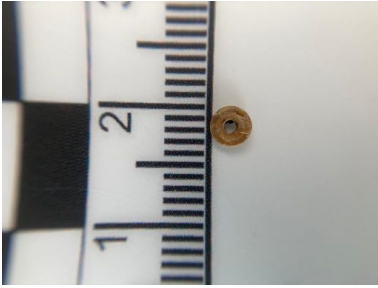
Did these posts hold up a structure? Another question we'll probably never answer with any confidence. The second photo shows the current situation with the grave. The upper surfaces of a few more bones are appearing and it would seem the occupant is lying on his or her

side in a crouched position. I admire the patience of our volunteers working on this feature.

### 2nd June : Dig Diary Day 15

Great to see some new and very welcome faces today. Although not quite as many volunteers as we've had recently there were still enough of us to have a very productive day. We had a visit from local archaeologist Roger Miket who came especially to look at the grave. His very respected opinion is that the occupant could yet be from the later Iron Age rather than Anglo Saxon (based on the way it's positioned) making the feature a very rare find in North Northumberland. There has been no further investigation of the grave today. We've had several more finds





of animal bone and an intriguing and complex junction of ditches. The many centuries of occupation of this tiny area of land by Prehistoric, Romano-British and Anglo Saxon people and their domestic activities makes interpretation incredibly difficult. The best we can hope for until we get more scientific evidence such as radiocarbon dating is a narrative based on what we see.

### 3rd June : Dig Diary Day 16

Another very sunny day with lots of volunteers (great to see new ones too!) and visitors. It seems we've had no rain since the dig



began and consequently the trench surfaces are very dry and require regular wetting. Despite the difficulty that brings we've had a few small finds including a significant piece of pottery (photo 1). Probably Iron Age but in his notes Kristian hasn't ruled out Bronze Age.



The second photo shows work on the grave feature. The upper and lower right leg bones are clear to see. Those of the left leg are beginning to appear too but there are hours of very patient



excavation yet to be done.

If the weather's good, we behave ourselves and Kristian's in a good mood he sometimes lets us take a break for lunch....only joking! Photo 3 shows the conviviality and informality of our group of volunteers. It's a very happy place to spend a few hours each day so please join us.

### 6th June : Dig Diary Day 17

We're now into the second half of our dig and things continue apace. The first photo shows the extent of our dig as it stands at the moment and there are still 'priority' features that we've yet to investigate. It's almost certain that we won't get to everything this time. Today we've found what is possibly our smallest ever find of interest.



Shown in the second photo is a 'bead' of 3mm diameter and was found in the burial feature.



It may have been made of a material so far unknown but equally may be natural (a fossil crinoid or 'Cuddy Bead'). These are found naturally along the local coast but may have been used as jewellery when threaded onto a necklace or bangle and buried as grave goods. The third photo is the bead enlarged. If it was a genuine component of jewellery we'll find more beads either in the soil directly or during our

post dig soil flotation and analysis.

## 7th June : Dig Diary Day 18



Another good turnout despite the cool and cloudy conditions allowing us to work simultaneously in several areas of our enormous trench. There are still two very significant features in the original trench 3 from our dig in 2019 that we would ideally like to further investigate if time and volunteer numbers allow. A few finds of animal bone together with a large fragment of very coarse pottery and shown in the first photo, once again most likely to be Iron Age (confounding the experts again who tell us that Iron Age pottery should have been reduced to dust by now!).

It's looking increasingly likely that only the main bones still exist in our burial feature.

Both femurs and tibias are shown in the second photo. It's probable that the more fragile bones have decomposed but together with the larger teeth we should have suitable and sufficient material to allow us to get samples for analysis. We hope to determine the age by radiocarbon dating, their ethnicity by DNA analysis and where they grew up by strontium 90 studies. Fingers crossed we'll achieve all three. We press on patiently and carefully on this feature. It's forecast to be dry as far as reliable weather forecasts can be so if you've not yet visited the site then anytime soon would be a good time.



## 8th June : Dig Diary Day 19

It's been another very busy day on site with excavation of several features turning up multiple finds of animal bone, teeth, pottery and slag. The slag is important because it provides the evidence for the production of iron on the site itself. One unusual find was a rim section of the base of a vessel. We haven't seen many of those. The site itself continues to pose more questions than we have reliable answers and the second photo shows how each feature needs a collective opinion based purely on what we can see. Without scientific evidence we must rely on precedent and experience. Today we also had a visit from the LHG chairman, Kevin Archer. It was good to get the opportunity to show him around again.



It's a big day tomorrow when we have a visit by children from Bailey Green School, Newcastle. Treasurer Helen, a former teacher, has designed what should be a great day for them involving everything from digging, round house construction, metal detecting and much more. Despite their presence, normal activity on the trench will continue as usual.

## 9th June : Dig Diary Day 20

Today has been very different. We divided our volunteers between keeping things going in the trench and providing our visiting school children with a day to remember. The eighteen children from Bailey Green School were 'handpicked' because of their interest in history. Prehistory isn't on the current curriculum so today's trip was intended for those attending their after school history group. I'm sure



they went home very happy with their day just as much as we were by contributing. So many photos were taken and so difficult to choose a couple for the diary. The first photo shows Kristian demonstrating flint knapping (he's an expert



in the art!), the second shows Ali demonstrating trowelling and the third shows young Janet confidently explaining to a group not much younger than herself. It was a packed programme but so rewarding.

Meanwhile in the trench it was business as usual. There's an astonishing number of finds at the moment, so many that we may be becoming a little complacent! One feature shown in the final photo and

uncovered today by Jo is a ditch that may be the oldest feature yet found on our site. Hopefully we may find a related artefact that could be dated.



### 10th June : Dig Diary Day 21

After yesterday's school visit it wasn't surprising there were fewer volunteers on site today but still a very respectable number. One of yesterday's photos suggested that we had uncovered a ditch that may be one of the oldest features on site. Today, whilst further investigating this ditch Kirsty found a significant piece of flint (photo 1) that, though not a finished tool in itself, it was waste from tool production. Kristian believes that this is probably of Bronze Age origin and just possibly Neolithic. We'll keep on incase we can find something that we can more accurately date.

We've now removed all of the fill in the burial feature. The only obvious remains are teeth (in very good condition), one humerus and both femurs and tibias together with a few shards of other bone. That's consistent with our many finds of animal bone that tend to be teeth and the remains of the long bones. Perhaps they're more resilient. We now need to decide our next move.



Today marked the end of week 4 and we now have only 2 weeks to go before we must close the dig. To date during this year's dig we've found more than 100 items of archaeological interest (that's more than 700 items since we began in 2019) and with the rest of our remaining time on site spent excavating we're likely to find many more.

### 13th June : Dig Diary Day 22

As expected today proved very warm for archaeology to the extent that we curtailed the day a little early. We can only imagine what it must have been like for those archaeologists in Egypt working on the tombs!

In trench 5, excavated in 2021, John HR worked patiently on what we perceived to be the centre of the mysterious 15m diameter circular structure imaged on the geophysical



survey. Multiple finds of animal bone and charcoal and a very deep water filled posthole about 1.5m below the surface were found but left us no wiser about the purpose of the feature. Today John returned to the feature in an attempt to unearth more of the structure. Whatever it is it's enormous (photo 2). Hopefully we can find clues over the next couple of weeks.



In other areas, notably last year's trench 6, we've begun photographing and drawing the

multiple and highly complex features. Should you fancy having a go at these important tasks (not as much stress on the knees!) please join us and you'll be made very welcome.

### 14th June : Dig Diary Day 23

Another very difficult day for excavation today and so more focus was placed on measuring and recording. There are many features that need to be finally excavated and recorded before we close up but we are able to get some of these tasks done. Our photos show drawing, measuring and photographing. Bright sunshine makes even these tasks more tricky. There has been limited excavation in the baked surface but Karen unearthed a major piece of bone in an area that has already been bone rich and promises more. We're back to using spades in an attempt to determine the extent of our 'wall'. We're 'chasing' this linear feature but it would appear that it's going to extend beyond our current fence line. We're very unsure about the history and function of this feature. Hopefully we'll find something we can radiocarbon date.

### 17th June : Dig Diary Day 24



After our two day unexpected break because of the hot and sunny weather (how many outdoor sports and hobbies can say that?) we were back in business today. The day began with a welcome visit by geologist Alison Tyman who clarified and identified some of our more obscure environmental finds including a fossil that we now believe is a worked tool though what it was used for is



conjecture. Alison pointed out a collection of tufa in one of our more mysterious features and appears to be a deliberate placement of this unusual rock. The even, light cloud cover also gave us much better conditions for drawing and photographing the different shades in the features we are investigating. Much attention has been placed on an area



that seems to comprise of three different overlapping pits, each packed with large animal bones including one jawbone complete with teeth. This will be a principal area on which we shall focus to the end of the dig.



More deep digging has taken place to track down another straight feature (as seen in the



geophysical survey) that runs parallel to our 'wall', about 25 meters to the west and may have a 'return' that joins them. Once again, a mystery but could be a huge rectangular enclosure, possibly post dating the main Iron Age features we've investigated so far. Our photo of Kristian with upper body only gives some idea of the depths to which have gone this year! So much to do and so little time in which to do it.

### 18th June : Dig Diary Day 25

A much quieter day today with fewer volunteers but great to see so many interested visitors. Perhaps there's a lesson to be learned for the future by making ourselves available on selected Sundays during digs and encourage those who may be unable to visit during the week because of other commitments. Today



our main task has been to very carefully remove the remains found in the burial for scientific analysis. Once samples have been taken the bones and teeth will be returned to their original resting place as soon as possible. The photos show the respectful care being taken during removal and landowners Tom and



Karen watching over the task. Other tasks today have been recording of existing features and further excavation of a very large posthole originally found in 2021. The posthole, about 30cm in diameter, marks the centre of what may be a Bronze Age structure

and appears on the 2018 geophysical survey as a 15m circular structure of unknown origin. Once again we'll be dependent on radiocarbon dating evidence to confirm it's age. We're back on site tomorrow from 10.00

### 19th June : Dig Diary Day 26



As we enter our final week we've begun a period of consolidation in that we want to get as much information as we can from our principal features by way of sample collection and recording. We've prioritised our tasks before we close down on Saturday and the first image shows our main active areas this week. Last night's heavy rain worked wonders to help differentiate the numerous ditches and pits that no amount of artificial watering could do (photo 2). The outer ditches of the roundhouse at the South East of our site were very apparent. The flooded burial feature was the best

evidence that we've removed all of the 'fill' with just base clay remaining. Quite sad really. In the meantime the teeth from the burial were separated and catalogued prior to sending for analysis. Together with samples taken from the long bones we hope to learn much about the person who lived here perhaps almost 2000 years ago. The final photo compares the human teeth with some of the numerous animal teeth found previously.

### 20th June : Dig Diary Day 27

Unfortunately, but not unexpectedly, our day was curtailed at lunchtime by heavy rain. Rain is good news during the night but not so good when our day's intention was to



measure, photograph and draw. Despite that our smallish team today concentrated on just a couple of our principal features. Our most notable task was the reinterment of the remains in the burial after small samples had been taken for further analysis. Due respect was given and the surface was manually reinstated with earth and temporarily marked (photo 1). The samples will be taken personally to the laboratory in Scotland for safe keeping. Further excavation has taken place around our best example of a roundhouse (there's evidence of at least six in the current trench) and several more animal bones were

recovered. One of these was in a somewhat awkward position intruding into one of the sections (photo 2). It will make the drawing more interesting! Over the next four days we have lots of measurements and recordings to take together with the completion of some of our features and so need as many volunteers as we can muster.



### 21st June : Dig Diary Day 28

An almost perfect day for archaeology today but a relatively small team out. There are still lots of recordings and measurements to make before close of play on Saturday but for those who prefer trowelling there are several features that need more investigation. In fact most of today has been spent excavating (photo 1) before a short but very heavy shower had us taking shelter in one of our tents.



As in previous years we've opted for total sample collection of the various 'fills' of our many features. Once the excavation phase has been completed we'll move into the analysis phase that will take several months. Quite probably until next year's dig begins. The third photo shows some of the sample buckets that have been collected. We'll be calling for volunteers to join us in that task too.

### 22nd June : Dig Diary Day 29

With headteacher Kristian now away to his next professional archaeology appointment (somewhat more exotic than the one he's just finished!) today hasn't been all fun and games. Rather we've been tidying up the site with housekeeping and manual backfilling of some areas. There are a few more areas (including a probable hearth and a curious ditch, both in last year's trench 6 ) that would benefit from last minute investigation tomorrow. In all likelihood we won't get the opportunity to see these features again once the whole site is backfilled by the digger next week. One area though has been specifically identified for further excavation (shown in today's drone photo). We've written about this feature several times over the last couple of weeks as a complex intersection of very clearly defined ditches and pits, possibly constructed over the several periods during which



the site was occupied. All being well, we shall return to this spot for a very concentrated, short term dig in early September this year. Though we're now winding down now tomorrow is a very important day for reasons that will be explained in the dig diary.

### **23rd June : Dig Diary Day 30**

Today we had the great pleasure to show Pete, Ged and Ali around our site. These gentlemen are from the Community Foundation, the body from which we receive the grants, and at our invitation came to see that we have spent the money given to us wisely. Many thanks to the volunteers who came along to make the morning so informative and I'm sure Pete and his colleagues enjoyed their time with us.

It's now very much end of term and with neither Kristian nor Deb available tomorrow to keep an eye on us we've now wound up proceedings for this year and so this will be our final dig diary entry for this year. The tents have been cleared and they will be taken down

along with the fence next week. The digger is also scheduled back to return the topsoil to its rightful place and give the field back to the sheep. Thanks to Tom and Karen once again for

their generous permission to occupy valuable land for the last couple of months. Today's photos show the final drone image of our 'office' (courtesy of David Robinson) and the last two wheelbarrows leaving the

site. Members of our WhatsApp group will appreciate why Helen is walking backwards!!

