



## Hunting Hall

### Dig Diary Day 1 - 11 June 2019

There was an early start today when Graham was on site with his mini digger to accurately remove the turf and topsoil from our two new trenches. As we'd all hoped this revealed several features for further investigation over the next couple of weeks. Attached are a few

of the many photos taken during the day.

Tomorrow's weather forecast is poor and so the plan is to meet in the Piggery at 10am when Kristian will go through today's outcomes and then outline the techniques expected of us throughout the dig.

My intention is to circulate this 'Daily Dig Diary' for the duration of the excavation and hopefully include photos of the important findings. I'll try to provide information about the intentions for the following day whenever possible.



## **Dig Diary Day 2 – 12 June 2019**

This morning we spent a couple of hours in the Piggery at Hunting Hall to discuss yesterday's findings, displaying some of the photos of the features. Without further excavation we can only guess about their likely origins. Unfortunately that won't be tomorrow because once again the weather is against us with heavy rain forecast for most of the day. However, Kristian managed to put a positive spin on this by saying that wetting the ground now will help us differentiate some of the features!

With the possibility that this site may be of some significance Kristian reiterated the need for accurate recordings using context sheets, sketches and photos. Kristian described how the context sheet should be completed but added that this will become much more clear once we get on site. I've attached a copy of the context sheet for anyone who has not seen it before.

We shan't meet tomorrow because of the weather and so we'll next get together at 10am on Friday in the car park at Hunting Hall. Once on site we shall prepare a 'Pre Excavation Plan' and continue to clean the two trenches.



## **Dig Diary Day 3 – 14 June 2019**

Given the amount of rainfall over the last two days we were pleasantly surprised this morning that we didn't find a couple of swimming pools where our trenches ought to be. Trench 3 was a bit damp but we were able to clean it straight away. Trench 4 was partially waterlogged but following a bit of bailing out we managed to clean it during the afternoon.

Trowel work began in trench 3 and we began the process of coarse sieving spoil samples in order to look for small artefacts. Work also began on the linear feature that runs diagonally along the length of trench 3. A boundary ditch, a path, a wall, who knows?

We meet again tomorrow (Saturday) at 10am in the car park when cleaning trench 4 continues together with further investigation of several features in trench 3.



On Sunday we shall have a visit by a local cub group when it is hoped they will have the opportunity to get their hands dirty!



#### **Dig Diary Day 4 –**

##### **15 June 2019**

There were lots of us on site today allowing us to work on several features simultaneously. The sun shone too so that made all the difference. Trench 4 was still wet and the spoil was quite muddy and difficult to sieve. In comparison the spoil from trench 3 was fine and dry and so most of the spoil was sampled. In addition bags of spoil from the different features have been saved for flotation and possible microscopy next week. We shall continue trowelling tomorrow on the different features.

#### **Dig Diary Day 5 – 16 June 2019**

Another productive day today with finds of medieval pottery and flint together with interesting features within one of the stone circular structures. Much more investigation to do yet. This afternoon also saw a visit by a group of cubs who were given talk by Kristian before getting into a bit of scraping in trench 3. Hopefully we may have stimulated a bit of interest in a few of them.

We're back on site tomorrow at 10am with a good weather forecast. Just a reminder that Tuesday will be a rest day.



#### **Dig Diary Day 6 – 17 June 2019**

Another great turnout of volunteers today. There's a wonderful camaraderie among us. Having fun but learning at the same time





contributing to what appears to be important investigations in the context of the prehistoric history of North Northumberland. The big news is that we found our first significant artefact today, a bronze brooch that could be dated anywhere between the Bronze Age and the thirteenth century. A photo is attached. Pieces of worked flint too that suggest Bronze Age activity. We appear to have Bronze Age burial features together with Iron Age structures. Still lots of work to do.

Tomorrow is a rest day so we meet again at 10am on Wednesday. Even if you can only visit the site for a few minutes you will be made very welcome.



### **Dig Diary Day 7 – 19 June 2019**

Another lovely day and more than 20 volunteers (plus 'Mist', one very happy dog!) enjoyed another productive day. As always the day began with Kristian briefing us on the current state of the dig together with the plan for the day. We're at the stage where careful trowelling is called for because we don't want to damage any delicate artefacts that exist just below the

visible surface. The brooch from Monday is still the subject of discussion and comparison with photos of similar prehistoric jewellery hasn't ruled out that it may be a bracelet from as far back as 2,500 - 1,500BC. Among today's finds was a stone musket ball, probably from the Civil War. Another discovery was an ergonomically shaped stone used to sharpen blades though that would be difficult to date.





## Dig Diary Day 8 – 20 June 2019

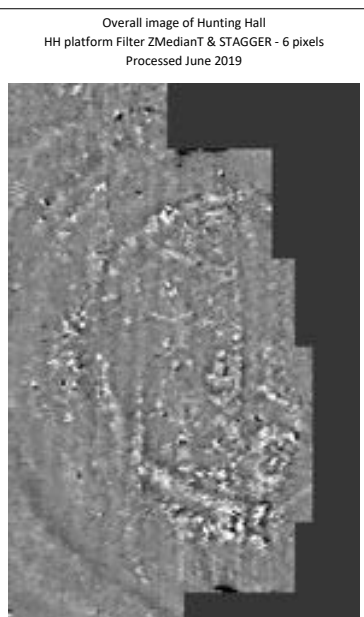
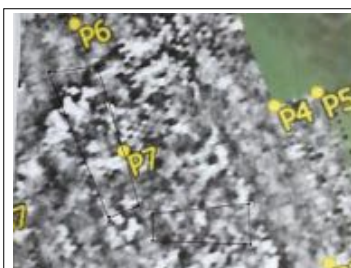
Slow progress today with most of us trowelling. Using accepted archaeology practice the intention is to trowel over the potential Iron Age features before we deliberately work on those from the Bronze Age. Our vision that the linear feature in trench 3 would be of uniform construction no longer applies because the four sections taken from it at different points along its length

all show differences in structure.

(Thankfully this eliminates it from the list of Victorian field drains we have a habit of finding!)

Find of the day was a piece of worked flint from Trench 4. Kristian told us that it can be dated by the way it has been cut and placed it in the late Neolithic period to the early Bronze Age so that would be around 2,500BC (optimistically perhaps consistent with the bracelet!). Kristian's objectives for the two trenches means there's still much work to be done. We're on site again tomorrow (Friday) with a reasonable weather forecast meeting at 10am.

Montage at Hunting Hall.  
Overall geophysics image, outline of trenches and drone photos of Trench 3 and 4



Overall image of Hunting Hall  
HH platform Filter ZMedianT & STAGGER - 6 pixels  
Processed June 2019

Trenches 3 (left) and trench 4 (right) overlaid on Geophysics

Trench 3 on morning 21.06.2019



Trench 4 on morning 21.06.2019



## Dig Diary Day 9 – 21 June 2019

This morning began in the Piggery where we displayed a number of slides to discuss the week's progress. I've attached a montage of images put together by Annie Robinson to explain where we are at this stage of the dig. The point identified as 'P7' in the first image is at the twelve o'clock position of the large circular structure that

has drawn so much interest, probably a Bronze Age burial feature. The straight line that passes through P7 represents the edge of trench 3. As you can see the circle then continues at about its four o'clock position into the outline of trench 4.

As probably happens on most archaeology digs the more you uncover the more complex it becomes. Accepting that people may have occupied this site for more than 2000 years with different ways of living (and dying) it's probably not so surprising that we're finding more and more features to investigate and interpret. The second attachment shows one of the sections and the complexity of intentionally placed stones. The third image indicates the position of the sections we have cut into trench 3.

It's unlikely that we'll get all of our objectives achieved in the time we've given ourselves but we intend to add a few days that takes us until at least the end of next week. The more volunteers we have the better chance we have of interpreting the site before we close it up. We're there over the weekend with a 10am meet tomorrow. Everyone more than welcome.



### **Dig Diary Day 10 - 22 June 2019**

Another industrious day today. Fewer volunteers than usual but a couple of significant features have been further developed that promise an exciting day tomorrow. It was decided at a lunchtime summary to begin the excavation of what appeared may have been a Bronze Age burial cist. After clearing the soil from around it's possible that the large stones may have been a single standing stone. Tomorrow should clarify. Charcoal and animal bones were found around the feature. Secondly work on another section of trench 3 appears to have revealed the base of a roundhouse. The evenly spread cobbles in the upper left of the second attachment suggest the floor. Once again we should know a lot more by this time tomorrow.

### **Dig Diary Day 11 – 23 June 2019**

A healthy number of volunteers today but the archeology has become more intense and therefore a little slower. The jury is still out on the burial cist / toppled standing stone. Careful trowelling around has revealed charcoal together with a large animal rib. A second rib has just been revealed. (Detention for anyone who suggests prehistoric barbecue!) Photos of these bones will follow as soon as I get them.

The round house still looks very promising but more sections through it are needed to confirm our 'evolving hypothesis'. Thank Kristian for that one!

We've decided that trench 3 is so busy that we shall probably not perform any further archaeology on trench 4 at this time.

Tomorrow is a rest day so we're meeting again at 10am on Tuesday. We hope to be on site until at least next weekend.



## Dig Diary Day 12 – 25 June 2019

Great to see so many volunteers today and the attached photo shows everyone was kept very busy. It may have been quite cold but things are definitely warming up on the site. The big news is the finding of our first pieces of prehistoric pottery, probably Iron Age but possible late Bronze Age (or both!). Sadly no photo because all of the very fragile pieces were rapidly whisked away for preservation. There's been more animal bone and a few more pieces of worked flint.



During the afternoon it was decided to take drastic action to resolve the confused patterns of stones we've been uncovering. Kristian wants us to remove all of the compacted surface soil from the area shown between the arrows in the second attachment. Hopefully this will more easily allow us to interpret how the features relate to each other.

In addition Kristian has asked that the link below is circulated. It includes an account of a very similar dig to ours at Dryburn Bridge in South East Scotland.

<https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/sair/>

The other good news is that there's good weather forecast for the next few days.

## Dig Diary Day 13 – 26 June 2019



What a difference a bit of sunshine makes! A lovely day today when we continued exactly where we left off yesterday by clearing the large area of trench 3 in our

attempt to clarify the confused picture we seem to have. In addition further careful clearing of the section producing the animal bone and pottery revealed yet more, as shown in the attachments. Current belief is that this is a pit, perhaps related to a burial. We seem to have bones from horse, cow, sheep and pig, all animals that had been domesticated by the Bronze and Iron Ages. There is also a length of bone of unknown origin but isn't human.

During the afternoon we lifted the right hand huge stone that we thought may have been a cist burial or standing stone. Current thinking is that it may have been used to mark the entrance to the site. We'll hopefully lift the second stone tomorrow. Who knows what we'll find beneath?

With so much progress and with lots more potentially to come we've now exceeded the 10 day period for which we had budgeted. We now expect to be on site for a further 10 days before we cover up the trench and backfill with the hope we can return next summer. In order to fund the extra days of Kristian's time together with the cost of the digger to backfill the site any further contributions of £35 (or pro rata per day of volunteering) would be much appreciated to help cover our costs. We hope that your involvement in what is turning out to be a genuinely significant project makes the cost worthwhile.

### **Dig Diary Day 14 – 27 June 2019**

Not many new developments today but we're still finding bone and pottery from several parts of trench 3. The good news is that over the next few days we're going to be visited by archaeology experts in both bone and Iron Age pottery. Hopefully that will clarify a few things and help Kristian interpret the site.

The area shown between the arrows in yesterday's photo has been worked on intensively today. At the moment the jumble of stones resembles a 1000 piece jigsaw tipped onto the table and you've yet to find the corner and edge pieces. You know there's a picture in there somewhere but as yet it's not obvious. Tomorrow should prove fruitful.

The weekend will see the last of the digging. At some point we must record all of our findings by way of sketches, photos, accurate measurements and interpretations. This is the bit that doesn't make the Time Team cut but it's an essential part of archaeology convention that will allow others to know precisely what we have done. We should then be able to close the trenches next week. I think it will be quite sad but hopefully we will be allowed back on site next year to carry on.

### **Dig Diary Day 15 – 28 June 2019**



It's been a very productive day, made even more enjoyable by the lovely weather. It's just possible that things are beginning to make a bit of sense and I've annotated the drone photo taken at the end of the day to indicate what we think may be happening. Today we may have found the platform on which one of



the giant stones once stood. Around it we have recovered another large animal bone and charcoal. (Tomorrow we hope to raise the second stone) Immediately adjacent is a very deep section that shows multiple layers of fill perhaps marking different boundaries over a period of around 2000 years. It cuts through the linear feature that has been apparent since day 1.

The section marked 'Pit' has been very productive and is the origin for most of the pottery and several bones. We believe it still has more to offer.

In the large stone filled section we may be uncovering the base of a roundhouse comprised of tightly packed cobbles. Immediately next to that may be a segment of the mysterious 15m circular feature that may be very important but is proving to be stubbornly elusive. Much more digging is required on this. Within that segment we may have uncovered a fire pit that is rich in charcoal deposits. Intriguing stuff!



I may have misled you in yesterday's update. We shall now continue to dig up until Wednesday but begin the recording of the features at the weekend. Our last day will be Thursday.



### **Dig Diary Day 16 – 29 June 2019**

It's been a rare day in North Northumberland with factor 50 suntan cream and lots of water in evidence. Lots of

archaeology too, today's finds including worked flint, chert, bone and animal teeth. We had a visit today from Roger Miket, author, historian and archaeologist who examined the site. Roger's view is that this may indeed be an important (possibly unique) site, mainly because there has been little investigation of similar Iron Age sites in which the semi circular ring ditches are truncated by a river even though several similar sites exist. The attachment shows Roger and Kristian discussing a section that incorporates the two huge 'standing stones', currently being worked on by Joyce.

There was more formal recording of the sections today. Apart from accurate diagrams, measurements and descriptions of soil texture and colour (it seems there are more soil colours than in a Farrow and Ball paint chart!) we also take photographic evidence as shown in today's second attachment. Differences in soil colour indicate 'fills' made at different periods. This section is particularly complex.



Cleaning up the large stone filled area has shown more of the cobbled surface but it's proving difficult to interpret because of the many complex intersections that have occurred over the centuries. It's very possible that this area may only be interpreted next year when we return.

### **Dig Diary Day 17 – 30 June 2019**

There have been more finds of bone and teeth today. (We've probably got enough bits now to reconstruct a whole animal though it might be a bit of a hybrid!). The first attachment indicates how the bones present themselves, tightly buried in compacted clay and earth and each find requires much patience to tease out.

For a few days now Kristian has believed there to be a fire pit set within what might be the mysterious circle. The second photo shows what might be a hearth.

After yesterday's glorious weather, today's efforts were curtailed by the ominous threat of rain but we're back out again tomorrow at 10am to make a final push this week.



### **Dig Diary Day 18 – 1 July 2019**

There were lots of volunteers this morning as we entered our final week of digging. Sadly from a sunny (if windy) start the weather intervened once again during the afternoon with rain causing an early finish.

A few more finds of bone but the big find of the day was a third very large stone in our 'standing stones' section. The presence of bone is preventing us lifting the second stone. It's possible that this will be one section to which we must return next year. It probably has much more to offer and

there's insufficient time this year to do a thorough job.



### **Dig Diary Day 19 – 2 July 2019**

Lots of activity today to get as much done as possible before closing down the trench later this week. Attention was focussed on cleaning and exposing more of the cobbles. These could represent paths or the bases of roundhouses but within the limits of our trench it's going to be difficult to decide. Ideally the trench would be enlarged in order to follow the curves and lines but we have neither the time nor the permissions. Hopefully next year. The first attachment shows a new curved area of cobbles in the lower right corner. Tempting to think roundhouse! The dark area circled is rich in charcoal and bones, probably a burning pit. We removed a large piece of charcoal from its centre this afternoon. The bones and charcoal will be ideal candidates for eventual radio carbon dating.

Activity in other areas of the trench related mainly to recording the sections. As you'll see in the other photos it's not the most popular job!

Big final push tomorrow to prepare the trench for final photos.



Kristian prior to asking for volunteers to do some recording.....



.....and after!

## Dig Diary Day 20– 3 July 2019

Well that's it, at least until next year. A busy but different kind of day today with barely a trowel in sight. Almost everyone was involved with measuring and recording



before finally covering the trenches with tarpaulin. Provided we get the relevant permissions we should be able to easily get back to where we left off when we return next spring or summer.

At lunchtime we had a visit by historic pottery expert Graham Taylor. He told us that our pottery finds were typical of those made by the community using local clay. The evidence for this being that the pots



were fired at very low temperature and quite crude, definitely not suitable for sale at the local market! Graham also left us a nice comment in the visitor book writing '*A wonderful site and really important to see Iron Age pots from Northumberland*'.



After all the hard work it may seem that all we have is a confusing jumble of stones. However, when you consider that this jumble was man made over a period of more than 2000 years when the stones were recycled and broken up to use for a number of different purposes from symbolic standing stones, for boundary marking and to laying cobbled yards and roundhouse floors it's not that surprising. Kristian will now write this up with his preliminary interpretations that have been backed up by other professional archaeologists. We hope that this will be sufficient for the powers that be to allow us to

continue next year (and in all probability for several years after that!)

