

Archaeology and Community

The 2024 Festival of Archaeology was a whirlwind of exploration, discovery, and community engagement for me as I travelled around the UK trying to visit as many events and activities as possible. It is always an enjoyable two weeks, if also exhausting, with almost 16 days away from home.

It is not just about enjoyment however, as the Festival of Archaeology is our key shop window for presenting archaeology to wider audiences and to help celebrate all of the amazing sites, places, activities, organisations, groups, and societies, that make up the UK's archaeological landscape.

Promotion and championing archaeology is a key role for the CBA, especially at a grassroots level. Since 2020, we have been shaping festival activity by adding a theme to each year's celebration. In 2020 it was climate change, 2021 was exploring local places, 2022 was journeys, and last year, creativity.

We know from feedback from festival organisers that they find the themes helpful in thinking about their activities each year, but the theme is not mandatory and our real objective with the festival is just to try and engage as many people as possible.

This year we chose Archaeology and Community as the festival theme. This was a deliberate acknowledgement of the CBA's 80th anniversary and the key role archaeological groups and societies played in our founding in 1944. Indeed, up until the mid-1990s CBA membership was restricted to organisations only.



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It was also chosen to help us think about our role today and in the future, how better we can support grassroots archaeology across the UK, and how we might strengthen both our own operations, and that of the network of groups and societies that still form a major part of our membership.

This aspiration, to be more supportive of grassroots archaeology, also runs through our major National Lottery Heritage Fund project, *Reconnecting Archaeology*, which started this year, and which will run until November 2025. We hope this project will help us connect better to the wide network of archaeological groups, society, and community projects across UK.

From our *Taking the Temperature* survey, which we undertook earlier

this year, we know that the network of grassroots organisations is facing a number of challenges, especially around attracting new members and getting people to support governance and organisation.

This is not dissimilar to our own experience, and we are keen to share our learning with our grassroots network over the course of the project and beyond. A key part of our *Reconnecting Archaeology* project will be developing a better understanding of our membership and network, as well as our wider audiences, both existing and potential.

We know from feedback that some people don't actually know what the CBA does or what we stand for. Therefore, we have taken the opportunity in this edition of British Archaeology to set out in more detail the various strands of work and activities we do.

From supporting our growing network of young people and Young Archaeologist Club (YAC) branches to our role in advocating for archaeology to government, the heritage sector, and further afield. From the Festival of Archaeology to our research projects, such as the PUNSt *Trowel and Error* survey, we hope this will give you a better understand of the work you help support.

My Archaeology features a range of our trustees, who play such an important role in overseeing our work, representing the interests of the



Above: Catherine Parker Heath, Marsh Community Archaeologist of the Year 2024

Right: Meeting the Small Pitts Big Ideas team in Worcester





Clockwise from far left: Test pitting at Hardwick Hall with the National Trust; Cleaning mosaics at Chedworth Roman Villa; Inside Dolaucothi Gold Mine; St Andrews Church Norton Bury St Edmunds

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membership, and setting our strategic direction. We hear directly from one of our Youth Advisory Board members about working with us during the Festival of Archaeology.

We have kept some of our regular features and asked our Chair, Gail Boyle, to act as a guest editor for this special edition.

We hope this will not be a one-way conversation and that by focusing a spotlight on our work you will have questions and suggestions for us. We need to better understand what our readers of *British Archaeology* and our members want from the magazine, what you like, what you would like to see more of, and where we can improve its content and focus.

We know, for example, that people like the letters page and have asked why it has been missing recently? Simply put, we have had no letters to feature. This is the one place we do need your help – you can write or email us on any topic, issue, magazine feature, or area of our work, and we will do our best to feature them in the magazine.

My Festival of Archaeology journey in 2024

Archaeology has the power to create and deliver some amazing projects working across communities and places. To recognise this work, the CBA runs two annual awards programmes: The Archaeological Achievement Awards, that celebrate

excellence in archaeology across the UK and Ireland; and the Marsh Community Archaeology Awards, celebrating community archaeology and archaeologists across the UK.

I was fortunate enough to meet three outstanding archaeologists and their projects this year, starting with Catherine Parker Heath, winner of the 2024 Marsh Awards Community Archaeologist of the Year.

Along with David Booker, Marsh Charitable Trust ambassador, we presented her with her award at the Family Archaeology Fun Day hosted by the Peak District national park in Castleton. Catherine is an outstanding community archaeologist, and it was a privilege to help recognise her work.

In Worcester, I met the winners of the 2023 Community Archaeology

Project of the Year Award, Small Pits Big Ideas, including members of the Worcestershire Archaeological Society, and Nina O'Hare, a community archaeologist at the Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service.

Their project involved over 400 local people in archaeological digs across six villages. This project exemplifies the power of community archaeology, bringing people together to explore their shared heritage.

Finally, I visited the Museum of Liverpool to meet Vanessa Oakden, a community archaeologist shortlisted for the 2024 Marsh Awards, and explored the museum's rich archaeological collections. Vanessa's work and dedication to community archaeology includes running the Mersey and Dee Young Archaeologist's Club.

Over the past three years we have worked with the National Trust on our key opening and closing events of the Festival of Archaeology. This year, it was the turn of Hardwick Hall in Derbyshire, to host the festival finale and closing event.

Along with the CBA team, the National Trust, and Headland Archaeology, the principal sponsor of this year's festival, the day was filled with activities that encapsulated the festival's theme – Archaeology and Community, reflecting on the connections formed, and the knowledge shared, throughout the festival.

The National Trust archaeology team and site really embrace the festival, and I was lucky to visit two other sites. At Chedworth Roman Villa I got the chance to get hands-on with the cleaning of one of their amazing mosaics.

I then was asked to help clean out the hypocaust in the dining room and uncovered a range of contemporary artefacts like lost plastic mosaic pieces, a coin, and replica tesserae dropped by the visitors.

At Dolaucothi Gold Mines in mid-Wales I got to go underground to experience the Roman mines. The site is a wonderful mix of industrial heritage and natural beauty, with the mines offering insights into both ancient and more recent mining activities.

The festival fortnight commenced this year with two wonderful days at the Scottish Crannog Centre on the shores of Loch Tay in Perthshire. The site is a real-life phoenix from the flames story following the catastrophic fire in 2021 which destroyed the original replica crannog.

The centre has now located to the other side of Loch Tay and rebuilt a new Iron Age village. We were delighted to help the centre celebrate its new venue with over 400 visitors on the opening day of the festival. Day two saw the centre host a craft skills day, with participants taking part in drystone walling, pottery, and birch bark, pith and wattle fence making.

My highlight at the end of the first day was swimming out into Loch Tay to the site of the stone crannog (see *First Sight*, p4). From not being able to stand or see the bottom to swimming over the stone platform and being able to stand up was incredible – the crannog seemed to appear out of nowhere, although visible from aerial photos.

Right: Institute of Archaeology Summer Field School, Norton, Bury St Edmunds



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Right: The pop-up archaeology exhibition at the John Lewis store in Leicester



Right: The Thixendale Art and Social Group



crannog in the loch more closely.

The UK has some of the strongest university archaeology departments in the world and we should celebrate their achievements. I was lucky to visit the UCL Institute of Archaeology's summer student excavations at Norton, near Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, on a lovely hot and sunny day.

The site is a wonderful mix of Iron Age, Roman, and early medieval features, and the team had been on site for several weeks by the time of my visit.

They were clear to point out that for most of that time the weather had not been so kind. It was lovely to see the students getting to grips with their first taste of excavating and the trenches next to the tower of St Andrews Church had a wonderful, picturesque charm.

It reminded me of the scenes of Kenneth Branagh excavating next to a

I was joined by Derek Pitman and Lawrence Shaw, hosts of the podcast *Career in Ruins*, although they chose to paddle board instead of swim. We all then got to sleep overnight in one of the Iron Age roundhouses on site.

Since the festival, the centre has started to build its new wood pile crannog. It will not only be a wonderful new feature, but will enable people to see the original stone



Top: Drystone walling at the Scottish Crannog Centre

church in the film of JL Carr's novel, *A Month in the Country*, which explores themes of restoration and discovery in a rural English village. This idyllic setting underscored the significance of archaeological work in interpreting cultural heritage.

The following day saw me in Leicester with Sarah Scott from Leicester University and Mathew Morris from the University of Leicester Archaeological Services to visit a pop-up archaeology exhibition in the John Lewis store. The exhibition was specifically designed for the festival and attracted many people new to the city's archaeology.

The exhibition provided a unique opportunity to connect with the public in a very different setting. The trail from the front of the store to the exhibit included wonderful tracings and the CBA's festival logo.

The festival always has a wonderful array of walks and exhibitions to visit. I finished my visit to Leicester by joining the Leicestershire Fieldworkers for a walk with Peter Liddell around Evington Moat and Parish Church, east Leicester.

Peter is the former county archaeologist for Leicestershire and long-time supporter of the Festival of Archaeology. At our AGM in February, he was awarded honorary lifetime membership of the CBA.

Top right: Spending the night in an Iron Age roundhouse at the centre



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Right: Pottery making at the Scottish Crannog Centre



Over the middle weekend of the festival, I was back home in Yorkshire, playing cricket on the Saturday, and leading two guided walks of the Thornborough Henges on the Sunday.

The Northern Henge has recently been purchased by English Heritage, and this was the first time I was able to lead a tour to all three henges to explore the full extent of this ancient landscape, and to learn about the archaeological significance of the henges.

On the second Friday of the festival, I was invited to visit the Thixendale Craft and Social Group exhibition on Wharram Percy. The artwork of the group has long been an inspiration to me, highlighting the importance of creativity in our telling of archaeological narratives.

The group's artistic responses to the archaeology of Wharram Percy and the Yorkshire Wolds illustrated the meaning local people derive from their heritage and it was a privilege to help celebrate their work with them.

Pauline Foster and all of the members of the group are my heritage heroes, putting the tiny and remote village of Thixendale on the map. It is a very special place full of very special people.

The Festival of Archaeology will be back in 2025, growing bigger with more activities for you to take part in. You can still access many of the festival resources by heading over to the CBA's website – we are looking forward to you joining us in July 2025.

Headland Archaeology Primary Sponsors of the 2024 Festival of Archaeology

The Festival of Archaeology would not happen each year without the considerable support we get from our funders and sponsors. This year, we have had a headline sponsor of the festival for the first time: Headland Archaeology. We are very grateful for their support.

As an organisation operating across the UK, they combine an in-depth understanding of archaeology with practical experience of major construction projects. They have just been awarded the contract to lead HS2's post-excavation work. This will be a mammoth 10-year undertaking and one of the largest post-excavation projects in the UK.

We are looking forward to working with Headland Archaeology and its partners to celebrate this work and if you are an interested in post excavation work and looking for a long-term job in archaeology then get in touch with Headland. ■

