

Jo Kirton, youth engagement manager at the Council for British Archaeology, reports on the world of young and aspiring archaeologists

Exploring local places

As this year's Festival of Archaeology draws closer, we have been focusing our attention on the Festival theme, exploring local places. We have been considering the ways that young people currently interact with their local landscapes and how we might support them to explore further, to discover new or untold stories about their locales, and how we might use these to encourage more diversity in the narratives we tell.

A key barrier to participation for young people is the fact that archaeology and heritage do not feel relevant to them. One of the best ways to overcome this is to work with young people to better understand what interests them, through formal and informal consultation. Then we can give them the tools and support for them to create and drive their own projects, exploring topics that are important to them and their peers, often referred to as co-creation (see Archaeology 8-25 in Mar/Apr 2021/177 for more on this youth engagement approach).

Exploring Local Places is the perfect opportunity to do just this, as it offers young people the scope to seek out somewhere that is interesting to them and spend time exploring that place and its associated stories. It is important not to put too many limits on how they might do this and how they might seek to share what they have found. It is also essential that we do not impose on them our own ideas about what heritage is, or our own values on what is deemed worth exploring.

On July 24, our annual Festival



YAC Takeover Day, we will be launching a new project and resources to support young people to explore their local place. Leicestershire Young Archaeologists' Club (YAC), for example, plans to create a short vlog about how to use the local record office as a young person, as these archives are often seen as too difficult or daunting to enter. The vlog will explain how to book and how to get a CARN (a reader's ticket for the County Archives Research Network) as well as what you can and can't do inside, with the aim of demystifying the process through peer support. We will also be launching our new YAC specific **Local Explorer Challenge**, which will encourage our members to get out in their local area and discover some of its hidden heritage.

Below: Bexley YAC surveying the site of Dartford Hospital, Kent, exploring local places linked to the two World Wars. Right: local young adults test-pitting at Conisbrough Castle, South Yorkshire

As well as resources we will be launching an exciting new partnership project, called *My Place in Time*, developed by SharedPast, led by Stewart Ainsworth, the landscape archaeologist from *Time Team*. We very much hope that this project will serve as a pilot to both a broader youth engagement and adult-focused projects, themed around the investigation of local landscapes and place.



FRANCINE HILLS/BEXLEY YAC (2), CBA

Stewart Ainsworth introduces My Place in Time

The past year or so has been difficult for everyone, and covid-19 has obviously presented a barrier to getting out and about. Perhaps more than ever families have found themselves confined to their local areas, unable to visit new places, explore popular heritage sites or participate in archaeological events. As a result, we have had to seek out places that offer us something confined more to the here and now – and which allow a healthy dose of social distancing. However, the SharedPast team has identified that those very restrictions themselves can be used as an opportunity to show young people, in particular, how landscape archaeology techniques can be applied to everyday places on our own doorstep, especially those not immediately recognisable as historical or archaeological sites.

This opportunity has been turned into reality with **My Place in Time**. This is a project designed to help young people explore, investigate and learn about the heritage of their day-to-day environment or places that have special meaning or memories for them – largely without leaving the house. Built into its format is a flexible



element of outdoor investigations which can be undertaken as and when circumstances allow. Thus, the project will be delivered largely online and is scalable and resilient to fluctuating or differing lockdown measures across the UK while they apply, but is fully transferable when the great outdoors becomes more accessible. The project is a collaboration between SharedPast, the Young Archaeologists' Club and the Council for British Archaeology.

The main focus of the project is to show young people how to find out information and identify changes over time in and around a chosen place, using a selected range of online resources, including historic maps, aerial photography, lidar and selected databases. The project will show that as well as looking outside for clues to the past, discoveries can be made by exploring new digital resources in a fun and exciting way. The approach will illustrate that archaeology is not all about finding things below the ground: it is possible to make your own discoveries without needing to dig or undertake geophysical survey. All that is required is access to a computer and a lot of curiosity.

My Place in Time will be delivered initially to YAC group leaders, who will subsequently liaise with the SharedPast team to tailor sessions and activities to meet their own local group requirements. Through this process both YAC leaders and members will



Above and left: Places can be explored and evidence for change can be found using online resources such as Google Earth and Street Views; bricked-up windows and doors reveal another life to a nondescript wall, and historic maps (here Ordnance Survey 25in, 1892) can help identify what they were part of

build up a mutual skills base which not only fulfils immediate needs but can also be used in future projects.

As well as introducing young people to new resources and skills, it is hoped that My Place in Time will help them to build a personal relationship with a landscape of their choosing, while at the same time raising their awareness of the heritage environment in general.

SharedPast and YAC wish to thank the following for facilitating this project: CBA; Charles Close Society; City of York Council/Explore York Archives; Epiacum Heritage; National Library of Scotland; Stabler Heritage; University of Chester. Stewart Ainsworth worked with the Ordnance Survey, RCHME and English Heritage as a landscape archaeologist and senior investigator. He is now visiting professor of landscape archaeology at the University of Chester ■

Left: Participants in My Place in Time will be shown how to find clues to how places have changed over the years in activity-based sessions with aerial photography and lidar; this is Hob Moor, York

