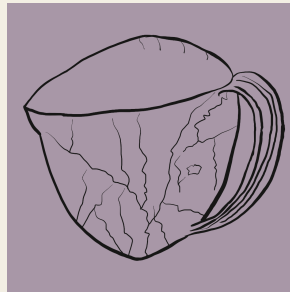


Connected Communities

The Power of Archaeology To Create a Sense of Belonging



Illustrated with drawings and haiku poems created by participants from four flagship projects, this pamphlet celebrates and shares new approaches to audience engagement in archaeology. It also offers guidance on what constitutes good practice – encouraging inclusive, grassroots, community participation.

Council for British Archaeology

The Catalysts for Change project forms a key strand of the Council for British Archaeology's (CBA) Reconnecting Archaeology project. Reconnecting Archaeology was an 18-month NLHF-funded resilience project which seeks to bridge gaps and strengthen ties within the archaeological sector by facilitating collaboration, knowledge sharing and networking opportunities.

At the heart of the project are two key objectives, (1) reimagining the CBA's role as a membership and network organisation in support of its long-term organisational resilience and (2) reshaping how the CBA connects with, and supports, grassroots and community archaeology and archaeologists. The Catalysts for Change project was developed in support of the second objective. It seeks to celebrate and share new approaches to audience engagement in archaeology by exploring and showcasing four projects – or 'catalysts' that constitute good practice for inclusive grassroots archaeology in the UK.

This pamphlet contains valuable guidance based on questions posed to four leading members of the Catalysts for Change projects.

These are:

The Scottish Crannog Centre (SCC);
Uncovering Roman Carlisle (URC);
CAER Heritage (CAER), Cardiff; and
Irchester Field School, Chester House Estate (IFS), Wellingborough in partnership with the University of Leicester's Heritage Hub.



Fortuna ...

Enigmatic gaze
Secret soft smile plays with
Hair, plaited like corn

JBH (aged 61)

Heat and stone make tools
Fingers and patterns make a pot
Wool and weave keeps warm

Maureen & Katrina



Collection in clay,
Loch Tay, a font of knowledge -
Wonders brought to shore

Laura, Katie, Rebecca

What do you feel has been the biggest success of The Scottish Crannogs Centre (SCC)?

Developing the museum to incorporate the wider community.

What do you feel has been the biggest success of the Irchester Field School (IFS)?

Engagement with young people in our area – from year 1 (2021) it was an aim to develop a programme that engages young people. Over the past 3 years we have developed a school programme that has engaged over 4,500 school students (KS2-GCSE) who have come to our site for a day-long school trip based around archaeology. They visit the excavation, the Archaeological Resource Centre (ARC) and participate in multiple workshops.

What do you feel has been the biggest success of Uncovering Roman Carlisle (URC)?

The creation of a community that has been very strongly bonded and continues to grow and be welcoming. This is as a consequence of having a project designed to be engaging with a wide range of people, backgrounds, and skills, who would not normally be able to engage in heritage or necessarily even be interested in archaeology. The opportunity for co-creation and co-production has become central to our overall ethos, leading to our volunteers “the diggers” creating artworks, merchandise, jewellery, sculptures, hosting and delivering events, conferences, books, engaging their peers and groups, supporting with post excavation and events, and more.

What do you feel has been the biggest success of CAER Heritage (CAER)?

Our biggest success has been the creation of aspiration-led narratives around our community’s heritage. This has been achieved through the ground-breaking use of archaeology as a vehicle for transformative approaches to community development, opening up new life-changing opportunities for people in our communities.



A word cloud for The Scottish Crannog Centre – visual summary of project reflections with frequency of words/terms represented by size.

New discoveries
Exciting experiences
Our spring of understanding

Norman



It was very hot
I found some Samian pot
I liked it a lot

Seumas

What do you feel makes SCC different from the other Catalysts for Change partners?

Through working on this project we saw the results of the work done at CAER and we reflected this back to our own organisation. We are a hands-on museum with recreated Iron Age buildings which draw a large number of the public in, thus we need to balance this with our community engagement. Our organisation is also larger than CAER and so has differing strengths and weaknesses.

What do you feel makes IFS different from the other Catalysts for Change partners?

A key distinguishing feature of the Irchester Field School is the depth of institutional collaboration and strategic support we receive at a senior level from both North Northamptonshire Council and the University of Leicester. This dual buy-in has been fundamental in shaping the way our project operates. Rather than being driven primarily by short-term grant funding cycles, our model is embedded within, and supported by, the long-term organisational priorities of both institutions.

This partnership has enabled us to integrate archaeological fieldwork, post-excavation, formal learning, community engagement and commercial activities into a single, coherent programme and operating model. The result is a project that is academically rigorous, publicly accessible, financially sustainable and structurally stable in a way that appears distinct among the Catalysts for Change cohort.

What do you feel makes URC different from the other Catalysts for Change partners?

We don't own the land we operate on, or have an established base in the same way the other partners have. We are a small charity and none of our trustees work for URC as a day job, it's all in addition to our day jobs. We don't own the objects we excavate either.

URC is an urban project, it's set in the heart of the only city in the borderlands region and we are committed to keeping it free to access for participants. It is the only project on a World Heritage Site and so links into that wider international network of sites by virtue of its location on Hadrian's Wall. Being in wider Hadrian's Wall ecosystem has given it an international reach and wider regional dimension.

What do you feel makes CAER different from the other Catalysts for Change partners?

CAER Heritage is unique for its deep-rooted partnership between community development organisation Action in Caerau and Ely (ACE), Cardiff University, local residents, and local schools. Through the co-produced research into our community's heritage, we have unearthed 6,000 years of history whilst boosting skills acquisition, widening access to education, and contributing towards community pride and resilience. Local people involved in the project are co-creators and co-researchers, shaping the project's direction and the interpretation of our heritage. Beyond archaeology, the project uses art, performances, poetry, walking trails, cinematography and more to make heritage accessible to a wider audience.

Lost deep in the clay
A small black bead, made of jet
Brought back to the light

Johnski

What challenges can you identify that you've had that are different from the other Catalysts for Change partners?

SCC The biggest difference is our rural location which means we have a smaller local population with poor transport links. Our effort to draw in volunteers and like-minded people can be more difficult. Since starting this project we have now partnered with a community bus to help combat this.

IFS One of the biggest challenges unique to the Irchester Field School has been inheriting an existing, long-standing archaeological project with an associated backlog of post-excavation commitments. Unlike initiatives that were able to design their programmes from a clean slate, we had to establish new systems, governance structures and generate income while simultaneously running the project. Managing legacy material, expectations and timelines required careful planning and additional resources in the early years of the project.

A further challenge has been designing a new way of working across two organisations with very different structures, cultures and constraints. Developing shared processes between a Local Government Authority and a university, particularly around financial procedures, risk management, staff roles and responsibilities and programme planning, has required extensive negotiation, flexibility and patience. These are not typical challenges for most community archaeology projects, which are often coordinated by a single organisation.

Finally, the scale of our formal learning and young person engagement work created its own pressures. Delivering thousands of school places, developing high-quality curriculum-aligned activities, and ensuring appropriate safeguarding and staffing levels, required a level of operational planning more commonly seen in large heritage organisations than in community archaeology fieldwork projects. Balancing this demand alongside excavation and research has been a distinctive challenge, but ultimately has been very successful.

What challenges can you identify that you've had that are different from the other Catalysts for Change partners (continued)?

URC Storage of the finds. We have a very good arrangement with SLR Consulting as to the ongoing storage of the finds, but we don't own the facility they are in. We don't have full-time paid staff – we hire in staff for the live excavations – but outside of those weeks we do not have paid staff. We all have issues with capacity and go above and beyond, but ours has a different dimension as it relies on such a degree of in-kind support and voluntary time from the project team, which can affect our day jobs and lives.

Popularity of the dig has reached the point where it is very clearly outstripping what we can offer.

We don't have a base, a museum, or a hub to operate out of. We rely on in-kind support from SLR Consulting, Cumberland Council, community groups and volunteers.

What are the long-term plans for your project, and how are you addressing sustainability?

SCC We are continuing to develop collaborative links with CAER, and are in talks with them about setting up a curiosity box that can be used to showcase our research. This will also be useful as a means to spread outreach into the community.

IFS Our next step of the project from an archaeological perspective is to hopefully excavate within the walled area of the Roman town of Irchester.

From an engagement perspective, it would be to further develop the Field School as a springboard for year-round community engagement with archaeology within the Nene Valley and beyond. We are conscious that our focus has been on a single site predominately over the summer months, but from our evaluation work there is a clear public appetite to learn and engage more with archaeology within the region throughout the year. We are piloting various ways we can do this, such as opportunities for volunteers and students to develop skills in the analysis of coins and pottery.

In terms of sustainability, we have developed a robust financial model with our excavations. Many excavations like ours struggle to know whether the excavation will take place the next year until fairly short notice because they are reliant on grant funding. We have built a model which draws upon our existing financial and other resources and commercial opportunities (without being a detriment to the community spirit of our fieldwork) to ensure we can excavate every year. Core funds and income generated cover core staff, post-excavation work and wider engagement activities.

What are the long-term plans for your project, and how are you addressing sustainability (continued)?

URC is exploring other sites around Carlisle for future excavations and has been asked by local stakeholders to explore certain parts of the city.

URC is identified as an economic and regeneration project by Cumberland Council and so is included in the Council's project pipeline as part of the new combined authority funding for the development of a temporary archaeo-lab and exhibition space as a proof of concept.

Development at the cricket club site for their new clubhouse is linked with the excavations and the URC CIO is working with the cricket club committee on the business case and funding for the cricket pavilion, which includes an onsite museum and archival storage space.

We are in the process of exploring an arts project with Weissenburg Roman Museum in Bavaria, and hope this will become a long-term international partnership based on the similarities between the sites.

We have partnered with an American archaeo-tourism company "Ancient Odysseys" which part funds the excavations. We are pioneering new sponsorship and merchandise opportunities.

We are developing an interpretation and arts piece to be installed at the cricket club site, along with an online virtual museum so that we can have a continued legacy even if we cannot return to the cricket club site in future, and to make the objects publicly accessible online.

Hidden earth found formed
Fire-baked hard square stamped,
Buried, lost back to earth

BN (aged 66)



Circles of life
Lead to adventure
Captured in structure

JHB

What are the long-term plans for your project, and how are you addressing sustainability (continued)?

CAER We're often asked how long we think the project will last. This is impossible to answer as our commitment is to work with the communities of Caerau and Ely in the long-term. In that sense there is no 'official' end date for the project. The partnership between ACE and Cardiff University in this respect is crucial as it provides some degree of sustainability in terms of staffing and resource. But that is not to say there aren't challenges. Major project activity is reliant on grant income – we have been successful over the years with a variety of funders including the AHRC, Arts Council Wales and the National Lottery. In fact, the CAER Heritage team has just submitted an ambitious project to The National Lottery Heritage Fund hoping to discover and celebrate the nationally significant Roman villa in Trelai Park. That doesn't provide any guarantees though. Nonetheless, the breadth of what we do means that we're able to access quite a diverse range of funding, not just that focused primarily on heritage. It's this diversification which is the project's real strength in terms of sustainability.



Found

Deep in soft earth
Tiny gods and stories sleep
Tales carved in stone

AG (aged 24)

What do you see as the legacy for your project from taking part in the Catalysts for Change partnerships? What have you learned from your partner project/site?

SCC We plan to continue to build our relationship with CAER and learn from their way of working. We have learned that communication with the community groups that are already established in the area can be easier than trying to form our own groups.

IFS The work the Uncovering Roman Carlisle project are doing around supporting unemployed residents in Cumberland back into the workforce is really interesting. It is something we have not really looked at doing locally but it is certainly an avenue we are keen to explore in the future when our capacity allows. It is a really good way to demonstrate the value that archaeology can have within a community. It is fantastic that they have clearly changed people's lives by putting them on a career path that they may have never considered previously.

Some of our project team managed to pop into the Scottish Crannog Centre while on holiday as visitors. In addition to being incredibly envious of their surroundings, it was clear that the enthusiasm and passion of the staff and volunteers was infectious. Around that part of Scotland, local people spoke about the Crannog Centre with real affection and it was clear the team there were building excellent links with their wider community. While highland Perthshire is a very different place to Northamptonshire, if we could achieve that level of local support and buy-in then we would be very happy!

What do you see as the legacy for your project from taking part in the Catalysts for Change partnerships? What have you learned from your partner project/site (continued)?

URC The connections to Irchester, the other partners, the CBA and a wider set of community archaeology projects around the UK have probably been the biggest legacy from our perspective.

Irchester was in some respects in a similar state to URC 8 to 10 years ago – albeit with some big differences in where it sits in their local government – and so there has been a number of learning points around funding, governance and future sustainability. Even if we cannot end up in a similar place as Irchester, there is much we are able to learn and hopefully incorporate into our future plans to make us more sustainable.

We intend to continue the relationship with Irchester and to travel to their site during our archaeological seasons to learn more and to continue building on the relationship. We also intend to offer online sessions to one another volunteers as part of our engagement programs.

CAER Since taking part in the Catalyst for Change partnership with the team from The Scottish Crannog Centre, we have made plans to continue the connection through co-produced artwork and research, particularly shared artworks. It's been a great way to share our successes with each other, and both projects now have excellent opportunities for further on-site visits and new, life changing experiences. We've definitely learned that distance can be easily overcome, and that by building these relationships we can vastly increase the opportunities that our organisations can support for our communities.



Cracked glaze, faded hues
Medieval hands made form,
Buried many years

KT

Three top tips for anyone looking to develop a similar inclusive community engagement projects from Scottish Crannogs Centre (SCC) and Irchester Field School (IFS)

SCC

1. Network with your local groups
2. Meet the needs of your local community
3. Monitor what you are doing and make changes accordingly

IFS

1. Take time to develop relationships with others/other organisations.
2. Consider any idea as a possibility. One of the things that has worked really well at the Field School is our openness to new ideas and to just trying new things.
3. Consider resourcing throughout. We learnt (sometimes the hard way!) that it is best to grow a long-term project like this slowly and sustainably than to jump in feet first and risk being overwhelmed.

Three top tips for anyone looking to develop a similar inclusive community engagement projects from Uncovering Roman Carlisle (URC) and CAER Heritage (CAER).

URC

1. Enshrine from the start certain principles, policies, and protections, for example; co-production, codes of conduct, defined goals (realistic/achievable ones at that), an idea on the project's legacy
2. Prioritise participants' welfare and make sure it is adequately resourced for them to be supported as part of the project. Needs can be complex but not insurmountable with the right support factored in, enough time, dedication, and compassion.
3. Have fun! Recognise it will be difficult to set boundaries. It will take over your life if you let it... it will take over slightly less of your life if you don't... so you really must be able to love what you do as it will become a big part of who you are potentially.

CAER

1. Ensure the project is designed by and for local people with people at its centre.
2. Inspire each other to work in new ways, it can create all sorts of wonderful opportunities.
3. Invest time and energy into creating meaningful partnerships. These can be a real game-changer, taking the project into all sorts of unexpected and exciting directions.

I realise that
The more we will discover
The less we will know

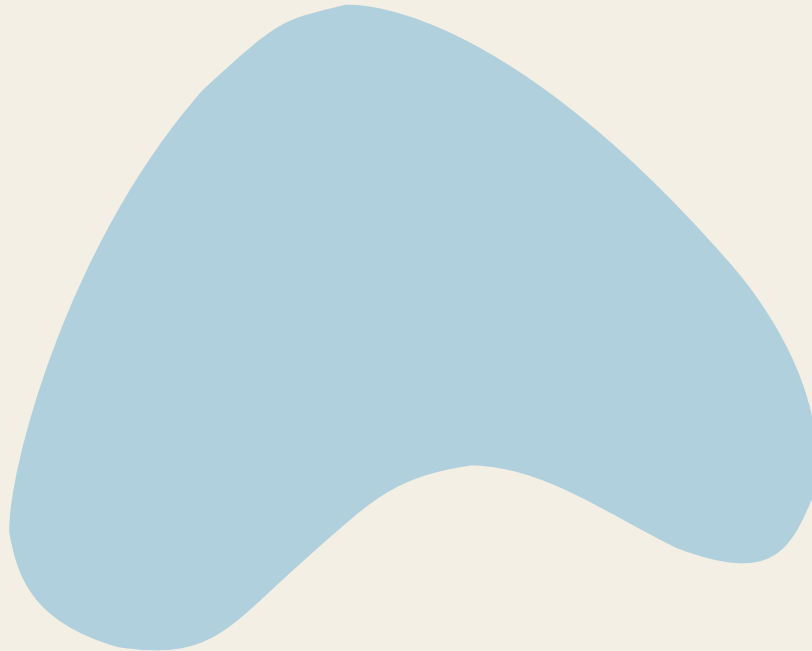
Clive



A word cloud for Uncovering Roman Carlisle – visual summary of project reflections with frequency of words/terms represented by size.

Friends in space, yet out
Of time, a group where I am
Welcomed, accepted

RC



Digging Trelai Park:
A bullet from World War II,
Fired by The Home Guard

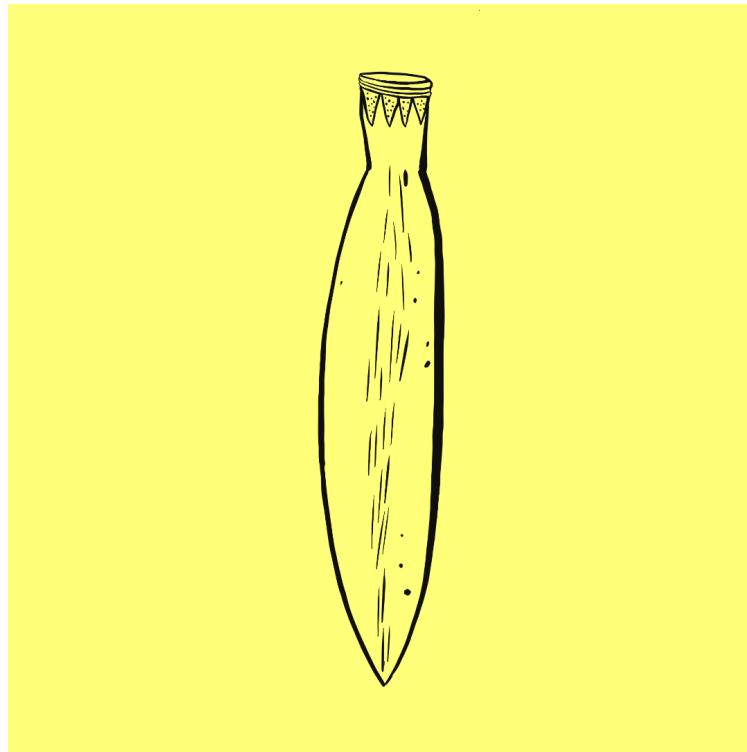
Rhi

Catalysts for change
The past connecting people
Feeling, friendship, fun

KG, aged 32



A word cloud for CAER Heritage – visual summary of project reflections with frequency of words/terms represented by size.



Caerau
Olden, primal,
Beneath the old landscape
Concealed under old stone
And soil
Waiting

Catalysts for Change: the pamphlet

This pamphlet is illustrated by drawings and haiku created during a series of online, blended and in person workshops devised and led in response to the creative brief for this project: i.e. to creatively embody the values, experiences and shared learning of the Catalysts for Change partner projects and to form a central element of the project's final guidance/set of principles.

The artists who have contributed to this resource are volunteers and project leaders from four outstanding archaeological projects in England, Scotland and Wales. Here are some thoughts regarding the ideas and creative methodology behind the workshops and this pamphlet.

I am fascinated by the extent to which words form images in the mind – the reading of an alphabetical code generating a form of virtual reality. I am also interested in the extent to which drawings might respond to and speak back to words. The drawings and haiku in this pamphlet might thus be seen or read as illustrations of each other – the images created in the mind by the haiku referencing/reinforcing the pictorial images expressed in the drawings, the drawings illuminating or embellishing the poems.

I am constantly amazed by the power of haiku short-form poetry to capture and encapsulate meaning and emotion. Haiku are created according to a somewhat arbitrary set of rules/structures – but it is a form that always demands concision. We chose the commonly accepted structure of five syllables for the first line, seven syllables for the second and five syllables for the third and last line.

The haiku is a word game, but it also offers a compressed form of meaning that demands re-reading to pick up on the subtleties of alliteration, rhymes, half-rhymes. What is also amazing is the quality and thoughtfulness of work that results from offering the permission to be creative and to 'play with words' a safe space in which to trust our instincts and 'go for it'. I trust that you will also offer and extend a safe space when admiring the beautiful drawings and reading the beautiful poems created for this pamphlet.

Paul Evans, February 2026

Catalysts for Change
The Council for British Archaeology

Lead Artist Paul Evans
Workshop design and facilitation, pamphlet design and production

Catalysts for Change Project Leaders

Ben Donnelly-Symes & Sarah Scott (Irchester Field School and Leicester University's Heritage Hub), Katie Morrison (The Scottish Crannog Centre) Tom Hicks (CAER Heritage Project), Nick Henderson (Uncovering Roman Carlisle)

The artists and writers that have participated in this project are:

Chester House Archaeology Project

Ben, John, Linda, Dawn, Seamus, Lizzy, Victoria, Carol, Emily, Clive, Norman, Doug, Jules, Mags, Jane, Pat, Roz, Julia

CAER Heritage

Tom H, Alice C, Tanya C, Sian, Frankie C, Lynne G, Sue, Poppy, Paul T, Kiefer

Uncovering Roman Carlisle

Nick, Alice, Neil, Pete, Janet, Beverley

The Scottish Crannog Centre

Laura, Katie, Rebecca, Maureen, Katrina

From The Council for British Archaeology and Bright Culture

Katrina, Esther



Council for
British Archaeology

1. The Scottish Crannog Centre (SCC)
2. Uncovering Roman Carlisle (URC)
3. Irchester Field School (IFS)
4. CAER Heritage (CAER)