

BRITANNIA ARCHAEOLOGY: TRAINING AND DEVELOPING VOLUNTEERS AT THE AYLSHAM ROMAN PROJECT

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In August 2019, professional archaeologists from Britannia Archaeology (BA) and amateur community archaeologists gathered in a field outside the town of Aylsham in Norfolk to begin a brand-new season of excavation. The field is part of a series of parcels of land owned by Mr Peter Purdy, the founder and director of the Aylsham Roman Project (ARP).

The ARP is a community-orientated organisation whose aim is to explore and preserve the archaeology and history of the recently discovered multi-phase settlement at the site. The goal is to involve the local community at every possible stage, while also maintaining a professional approach both to the excavation of the site and the publication of the findings.

BA help to organise, advise and train volunteers taking part in the project. Through months of close planning between BA and the ARP for each season, all aspects of the upcoming excavation areas are decided as well as organisation of additional specialist days, and visits from local schools, history groups and other professionals.

One of the key aims for the project has always been the training and development of the volunteers that attend the excavation each season. The volunteers can take part in all aspects of the archaeological work, from the excavation of features through to planning and completion of context records. All this is done under the close supervision and guidance of BA, applying the same standards that would be applied to professional work.

ARP's first excavation season was undertaken in August 2016. An earlier evaluation of the site had defined the location of a probable Roman kiln and several associated features. The excavation area encompassed these and other anomalies that were shown in the preceding geophysical survey. The excavation was successful in locating and excavating two Roman kilns, associated rake pits, a waste pit and several smaller features possibly pre-dating the kilns.

Since this first season multiple new areas have been opened, targeting areas of interest and expanding on areas already excavated. The work has gone on to identify archaeological features ranging in date from the Bronze Age through to the post-medieval period. A key excavation area in 2018 identified the presence of 11th/12th-century

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enclosures and possibly structural remains. Due to the presence of the Roman pottery production industry on the site, the number of finds recovered has been understandably high, with a 100 per cent retention policy in place. Currently over 30,000 individual finds have been processed ready for examination by the appropriate specialist.

The volunteers and members of the project are involved at every step. Initially a group of about 30 signed up to take part in 2016. Now, in the most recent season, this has grown to over 90 people and the project saw a daily footfall of up to 170 visitors.

The project is open for all to take part, no matter their level of archaeological experience. BA has developed a training system that helps to ensure that every person who turns up to either dig, wash finds or help survey is given the relevant training and tools to assist in their development. The project has seen many returning individuals who have gone from no experience in 2016 to now helping to train and supervise volunteers in 2019.

All development can be tracked on a specially designed PDP document and training log based on the CfA system. Members of the project who had no experience have now gone on to apply for courses and other projects using the PDP as a basis for their application. The project has also served as a training system for undergraduates, with students from multiple universities visiting and working with BA to gain valuable fieldwork experience; some have gone on to gain employment in other archaeological units and institutions.

The coming season will be no different; plans are already well underway for the year's excavation areas, tasks and training activities. Above all, everybody involved is excited and enthusiastic to begin revealing more of this multi-phase site.

More information on the Aylsham Roman Project can be found at <https://aylshamromanproject.com/> and Britannia Archaeology's website <http://www.britannia-archaeology.com/>



Martin Brook with a young volunteer in the children's excavation area. Credit: Kevin Myhill



Volunteers excavating Roman enclosure ditches in 2019. Credit: Britannia Archaeology Ltd



Volunteers after completing 30 test pits in area under evaluation. Credit: Britannia Archaeology Ltd



All the finds processed by the volunteers at the end of day 1 of the 2019 season. Credit: Britannia Archaeology Ltd