

Member news

IN CONVERSATION WITH



Butser round house. Credit: Kevin Reilly

In June, Kevin Reilly and Alex Llewellyn, ClfA's Head of Governance and Finance, had a conversation about how he became involved in archaeology, some of the volunteer projects he has been part of and why he had become accredited with ClfA.

Can you tell me more about your previous careers?

I was in the army, and part of a quick response team in Northern Ireland during the height of the Troubles. I was injured by an explosion whilst my team attended a bombing. After leaving the army I joined the ambulance service and later became a forensic social worker. All jobs proved to be emotionally challenging for me, so inevitably I ended up taking early retirement.

How did you get interested in archaeology?

Archaeology was something completely new to me after retirement. I'd initially heard about the benefits of archaeology for people with mental health issues and took up conservation work with Bournemouth University working on the original HMS *Illustrious*. I later contacted Richard Osgood, lead archaeologist for the MOD, through veteran channels, to learn that Operation Nightingale was a project that specifically linked wounded serving military personnel to archaeological digs. Dickie Bennett (an ex-Royal Marine who had been involved in Operation Nightingale) had set up Breaking Ground Heritage so that military veterans could also be part of the programme. Archaeology has huge value for people with PTSD.

KEVIN REILLY, PCIFA

I strongly believe that people need to understand the past to be able to think about the future.

Can you tell me more about some of the projects you've been part of?

I've taken part in a lot of different projects, for example Barrow Clump on Salisbury Plain. The military own 1 per cent of the most prime archaeological land in the country. At Dunch Hill (Wiltshire), Operation Nightingale uncovered evidence of a late Bronze Age roundhouse, which amazingly led onto an experimental archaeology project with Trevor Creighton at Butser Ancient Farm in Hampshire, to recreate the roundhouse using different types of materials to build the walls. These walls will be monitored over time to see which materials survive the best. I am proud to be able to help interpret this experiment to the public with other colleagues.

Most recently I got interested in an excavation of a midden at East Chisenbury, again on Salisbury Plain. This led to me being part of a project called FeastNet, where we have been carrying out multi-isotope analysis of the midden remains under the supervision of Dr Richard Madgwick at Cardiff University. It has been absolutely fascinating to understand how the analysis is undertaken, and what we are capable of learning about the inter-community networks, climate, health and mobility at that time. Most interesting is the belief that people travelled miles to participate in great feasts, in an attempt to preserve society at a time when trade was breaking down.

Find out more about Operation Nightingale, Breaking Ground Heritage and some of the projects Kevin has been involved in:

Operation Nightingale – GOV.UK (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/operation-nightingale>)

BGH Online (breakinggroundheritage.org.uk)

Butser Ancient Farm – Bronze Age roundhouse (www.butserancientfarm.co.uk/blog/2021/5/4/breaking-ground-on-the-bronze-age-house)

FEASTNET – Feasting networks and Resilience at the end of the British Bronze Age (<https://feastnet.co.uk/>)

What have been the most interesting aspects of what you've been involved in?

I find the analysis of the things we find to be so intriguing and informative, as well as thinking about how society developed, of people's roles within their communities and especially trade. It's fascinating to think about how communities stayed together during times of deteriorating climate, how they experimented and came up with significant inventions such as charcoal to create extreme heat, metallurgy and the production of tools and weapons, even how they moved livestock over such distances to attend those feasts. I strongly believe that people need to understand the past to be able to think about the future.

Why did you feel it was important to get your CfA accreditation?

I recently became a Practitioner as I want to be part of an archaeology community and to see what I can further participate in. It seems to be a great opportunity to share information and open channels of communication with other professionals. Often when I talk to the public they see me as an army veteran, but my CfA accreditation recognises the competence I have in archaeological practice.



*Kevin Reilly carrying out multi-isotope analysis of the midden remains.
Credit: Kevin Reilly*