



# Digs Special 2014

Sedgeford excavation

As the summer excavation season looms, POLLY HEFFER guides us through her pick of the digs and archaeological experiences available this year in the UK and Ireland.

### Digs Guide 2014

Digs Guide Editor: Polly Heffer

Polly is an archaeologist and the editorial assistant for *Current World Archaeology* magazine.



#### GET IN TOUCH

Do get in contact with us if you would like your 2014 excavation to feature among the free listings on the *Current Archaeology* website.

Email: [polly.heffer@world-archaeology.com](mailto:polly.heffer@world-archaeology.com)

It is that time of year again, when the sun starts to shine and those of an archaeological persuasion begin making plans for the coming excavation season. Volunteers are an essential part of most excavations, and without them many projects simply would not be able to complete their annual objectives.

Regardless of age, ability, finances, and time, whether you are an accomplished digger or an armchair enthusiast wanting to give it a go for the first time, there is a project out there for you.

For this year's Digs Special, we have flagged up a range of projects that offer training for beginners, as well as opportunities for more experienced archaeologists to hone their skills, digs for students to earn academic credit, and digs that are completely free, as well as a selection of ways to get involved that do not require getting your hands dirty. Hopefully, we can bring you closer to finding your perfect archaeological experience.

We have also spoken to two old pros in the field – former Time Team archaeologist Raksha Dave, and University of Southampton doctoral student Lucy Shipley – to get their views on why taking part in an archaeological excavation is so much fun.

Over the following pages we have a great selection of digs from around the UK and Ireland to whet your appetite for the coming season, but you can also see the full listings on our website at [www.archaeology.co.uk/digs](http://www.archaeology.co.uk/digs) – there you can search by location, date, length of commitment, and cost. Do remember that places on digs are limited, and spaces fill up quickly, so book early to avoid missing out.



Oakington Field School

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with us online:

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## Digging down memory lane

**Archaeologist and Time Teamer RAKSHA DAVE remembers her first dig.**

There is nothing quite like being part of an archaeological field-research project. The very thought makes me misty-eyed and nostalgic. Ask any archaeologist about their first field-training and I can guarantee their response will be the same. Whether it is a field school you have joined for a few weeks, or field days you have to complete as part of a university course, there is no other experience that can beat it. Yes, digging in a muddy field for a few weeks or walking for miles through rough terrain does not sound glamorous – or a great way to spend time away on holiday – but be warned: once you try it, you will be hooked.

My first ever field-training dig was at Bignor Roman Villa near Arundel, along with 30 other undergraduates looking every bit as bewildered and excited as me. I can honestly say that the following week was one of the best I have ever had. We experienced the full range of human emotions: blood, sweat, tears, and more! Being away on a dig can be quite an adventure; the intense learning and sometimes the geographical isolation physically removes you from the outside world, so all that matters is what has been discovered that day, and what

entertainment you and your dig-mates can conjure up after digging hours.

Needless to say, every research project I have subsequently joined or run has been just as exciting and thrilling as the first. Being part of the team at DigVentures and running the field school can be quite demanding. But for me, the only thing I find stressful is whether the experience we are providing lives up to any of the projects that I have ever been on. It is quite humbling to know that people want to join you for two weeks, either from the local area or flying in from the other side of the world. The mix of people who come to our sites is really the best thing: there is something lovely about watching a plumber from Bristol make friends for life with a retiree from Melbourne and an undergraduate student from Glasgow. It seems getting your hands dirty can quite literally change your life!



IMAGE: DigVentures



## MA Archaeological Practice

This course deals both with academic and professional archaeology, including our Birkbeck field school based at Must Farm that is co-taught by members of the Cambridge Archaeological Unit. Birkbeck students have a confidence in context gained from their skills in reading and interpreting primary evidence, allowing them to break open the materials in archives, collections, excavation and the landscape itself.

This course is for those that want to study and join the discipline, and for professional archaeologists to develop their research agenda.

**The following courses are available to start in October 2014:**

- Certificate in History and Archaeology
- BA Archaeology
- BA History and Archaeology
- MA Archaeological Practice
- MA Classical Archaeology



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[communityarchaeology@museumoflondon.org.uk](mailto:communityarchaeology@museumoflondon.org.uk)



# Experience

Beginners might like to try digging for just a day, while those with a few excavations under their belts might want a dig requiring more experience. Here are the best of both.

## 3 DIGS FOR A DAY

### DigVentures at Leiston Abbey (East)

T: 020 8333 5770

W: <http://digventures.com/projects/saints-and-secrets-2014/>

### Rufford Abbey Volunteer Excavation (Midlands)

T: 0115 969 6525

W: [www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/communityarchaeology](http://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/communityarchaeology)

### The Sussex School of Archaeology at Plumpton Roman Villa (South East)

T: 01323 811785

W: [www.sussexarchaeology.org](http://www.sussexarchaeology.org)

## 3 DIGS FOR EXPERIENCED DIGGERS

### Sedgeford Historical and Archaeological Research Project (East)

T: 07791 646299

W: [www.sharp.org.uk](http://www.sharp.org.uk)

### Surrey County Archaeological Unit at Woking Palace (South East)

T: 01483 518737

W: [www.surreycc.gov.uk/communityarchaeology](http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/communityarchaeology)

### Irish Archaeological Field School at Blackfriary (Eire)

T: 00 353 1 296 8190

W: [www.iafs.ie](http://www.iafs.ie)

### Editor's Pick

### DigVentures at Leiston Abbey

In 2014, DigVentures return to Leiston Abbey in Suffolk for their second season of excavations there. They will be following up on last year's results with further investigations of the previously unknown prehistoric phase, examining crop marks found during aerial kite photography, and excavating in the heart of the Medieval abbey complex.

You do not need any experience to participate, since training is provided, and all abilities are catered for – children are welcome when accompanied by an adult. You can join the dig for anything from a day right through to the whole two-week campaign. As well as digging, there is a full programme of evening lectures, outings, and an on-site pub! Find out more at [www.digventures.com](http://www.digventures.com)

### Editor's Pick

### University of Bangor at Meillionydd

This summer, Bangor University's School of History, Welsh History, and Archaeology will return to the site of the 'double ringwork' hilltop enclosure at Meillionydd, near Rhiw, on the Llyn peninsula in north-west Wales for a fifth excavation season.

The project will focus this year on further examining a cobbled road that leads from the entrance through the outer bank to the inner entrance. It was discovered in 2012.

The excavation, taking place in June and July, is run as a field school for archaeology students, but the project is also open to a limited number of external volunteers, all of whom will be trained alongside the students in archaeological excavation and field recording techniques.

Find out more about the Meillionydd excavations on their website: <http://meillionydd.bangor.ac.uk/>

## Cost

It is worth keeping in mind that many digs offer subsidised places, concessions for students or charge only a minimal amount, such as the cost of joining the local archaeological society. If you are looking for digs that will not hurt your pocket, the following are completely free.

## 5 DIGS THAT WON'T COST A PENNY

### University of Oxford at Moel-y-Gaer (Wales)

T: 07971 782788

W: [www.arch.ox.ac.uk/bodfari.html](http://www.arch.ox.ac.uk/bodfari.html)

### Swaledale and Arkengarthdale Archaeology Group: The Swaledale Big Dig (Yorkshire)

T: 01748 884938

W: [www.swaag.org](http://www.swaag.org)

### Surrey County Archaeological Unit at Woking Palace (South East)

T: 01483 518737

W: [www.surreycc.gov.uk/communityarchaeology](http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/communityarchaeology)

### Elmet Archaeological Services at Hickleton Hall (Yorkshire)

T: 01709 873053

W: [www.elmetarchaeology.co.uk/communityprojects.html](http://www.elmetarchaeology.co.uk/communityprojects.html)

### Rufford Archaeological Field School (Midlands)

T: 0115 969 6525

W: [www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/communityarchaeology](http://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/communityarchaeology)

## Excavation highs and lows

DR LUCY SHIPLEY recently completed her PhD at Southampton University, and has plenty of experience with the vagaries of digging. Here she tells us why she keeps coming back to the trenches.

Digging can be simultaneously one of the most exhilarating and most boring activities you can take part in. Trust me, there is nothing worse than a sterile trench, with a sum total of zero finds. The hope and anticipation grows with every change in the soil matrix, as you burrow deeper and deeper in search of a discovery. Any discovery! On the other hand, there is no better feeling than gazing at an object that has been lying beneath the earth for centuries, because everything is buried treasure to an archaeologist. It is amazing how specialists can bring even a modest scrap of pottery to life.

So there are highs and lows, but usually far more of the former. And these do not just come from the soil. Digs can be powerful bonding experiences, where you will find yourself having conversations with

IMAGE: Lucy Shipley



Lucy Shipley

people from all walks of life about subjects you would never have imagined, or being introduced to books or television shows you never thought you would like, before linking such trench chat to the people working around you. Is your colleague's beard more *Game of Thrones* or *Lord of the Rings*? Who will confess to buying a gardening, rather than an archaeological, trowel by mistake? While the bond begins in the trenches, it is off-site in a local pub or under canvas in a field that you really find out about your fellow-diggers – and forge friendships that last forever.

As well as making a real contribution to our understanding of the past, the digging experience will leave you with all manner of treasured in-jokes that nobody else will ever understand. I still fondly remember the summer when members of the public repeatedly asked if we had found dinosaurs (unfortunately an occupational hazard for archaeologists), the afternoon when we rescued a baby owl from farm cats and kept it safe until the animal-welfare authorities arrived, and the euphoric moment when we realised that two walls in neighbouring trenches joined up. Sound a little perplexing? Maybe you had to be there, which is exactly my point.

Wherever you dig, happy excavating – and may your trenches never be sterile.

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## 'Digs' with the Kent Archaeological Field School

This year we have three stunning opportunities to investigate sites of national importance in Kent. No previous experience is necessary as you will be trained in excavation techniques used by professional archaeologists. For more information see:  
[www.kafs.co.uk](http://www.kafs.co.uk)

**Easter Excavation of a Roman Villa at Teston, near Maidstone in Kent: April 18th to 27th**

**Excavation of Bronze Age Barrows at Hollingbourne in Kent: July 12th to 20th**

**Excavation of a Roman Bath-House at Faversham in Kent: August 2nd to 17th**

**Training Week for Students on a Roman villa in Faversham: August 11th to 17th**

Members £20 a day, non-members £25. Training Week £100.  
For further details and other courses with KAFS see our web site or email [info@kafs.co.uk](mailto:info@kafs.co.uk)



# Academic credit

Are you a student looking for that all-important fieldwork experience to complete your course? The following digs will all earn you academic credits.

## 5 DIGS THAT EARN ACADEMIC CREDIT

### University of Exeter at Ipplepen (South West)

T: 01392 724350

W: <http://humanities.exeter.ac.uk/archaeology/fieldwork/ipplepen/>

### Institute for Field Research at Penycloddiau (Wales)

T: 00 1 424 226 6130

W: <http://www.ifrglobal.org/programs/eu/u-k-penycloddiau>

### University of Leicester at Burrough Hill (Midlands)

T: 0116 252 5038

W: [www2.le.ac.uk/departments/archaeology/research/projects/burrough-hill](http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/archaeology/research/projects/burrough-hill)

### Bournemouth University at The Durotriges Big Dig (South West)

T: 01202 961916

W: [www.bournemouth.ac.uk/discover-the-past](http://www.bournemouth.ac.uk/discover-the-past)

### Caherconnell Archaeological Field School (Eire)

T: 00 353 65 708 9999

W: [www.caherconnell.com/v2/courses](http://www.caherconnell.com/v2/courses)

#### Editor's Pick

### Kent Archaeological Field School

Kent Archaeological Field School (KAFS) has been running for more than a decade, and 2014 will see another season packed full of excavations and short courses.

A training week will run in August, during which complete beginners will learn the basics, while for more-experienced diggers there is the opportunity to join excavations in and around Kent.

This year will be the second season of excavations at the Roman villa on the banks of the River Medway at Teston. The July field school will be excavating three Bronze Age barrows on the North Downs, east of Hollingbourne. In August, KAFS will be at the Roman waterside building at Abbey Barns in Faversham, where they will be investigating the east end of the building, as well as adjacent Roman structures.

KAFS also has a number of courses running from April to June: how to identify Roman building materials; an introduction to archaeology; aerial surveying; surveying for archaeologists; and landscape archaeology.

Many courses require KAFS membership. Find out more about KAFS on their website: [www.kafs.co.uk](http://www.kafs.co.uk)

#### Editor's Pick

### Sussex School of Archaeology

The Sussex School of Archaeology Ltd (SSA) is an established centre providing archaeology courses to the general public and more specialised training courses for amateur and professional archaeologists. In 2014, they have a packed schedule of day schools and week-long training courses.

Day-school topics include site survey, first aid for finds, planning and section drawing, photography for archaeologists, and excavation techniques for beginners.

The week-long training courses include excavation techniques, context records, recording plans and sections, photography, environmental sampling, finds processing, on-site surveying techniques, and geophysical prospecting methods.

Find out more about Sussex School of Archaeology courses on their website: [www.sussexarchaeology.org](http://www.sussexarchaeology.org)

## Other experiences

**Everyone knows there is far more to archaeology than just digging in trenches! The following archaeological courses and workshops offer alternatives to excavation work.**

**Caerleon Samian Group (Wales):** Roman pottery workshops run throughout the year, working on samian plain ware, stamps from Caerleon, and decorated samian from Lezoux, as well as later Roman pottery from Cardiff Castle.  
E: peter.webster@museumwales.ac.uk  
W: [www.museumwales.ac.uk/takepart/volunteering/](http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/takepart/volunteering/)

**SHARP (East):** One-week courses in basic excavation and recording techniques, the archaeology of WWI, standing buildings and church archaeology, archaeology of human remains, landscape, and archaeometallurgy; and day courses in Anglo-Saxon cooking, and flint in archaeology.  
T: 01483 518737  
W: [www.sharp.org.uk](http://www.sharp.org.uk)

**Elmet Archaeological Services (Yorkshire):** Workshops include pre-industrial ironmaking, zooarchaeology, aerial photography, sampling in archaeology, map regression skills, human evolution, and archaeological illustration.  
T: 01709 873053  
W: [www.elmetarchaeology.co.uk/workshops.html](http://www.elmetarchaeology.co.uk/workshops.html)

**Luton Culture (South East):** Introductory and advanced courses in practical human osteology.  
T: 01582 547969  
W: [www.lutonculture.com/learning/short-courses-in-practical-osteology/](http://www.lutonculture.com/learning/short-courses-in-practical-osteology/)

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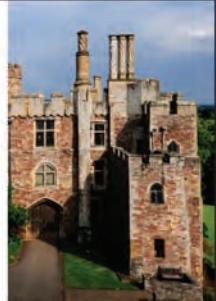
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