

# Chapel Fell blog

## An informal view of the IAG excavation

Day 10 of the excavation: the last day  
Friday 27 May 2016

### What a fortnight

The 'chapel' with the dias and cobbled floor that hadn't got either. The iron age roundhouses. The sow kiln. The rain. The sunshine. The features on the hill. The learning (for me). The friendship. The jokes. The finds: coal, iron, slate, charcoal, pot boilers (stones for heating water), a glass bead, flint, chert and cast iron.

No, we didn't find buried treasure. But we did make sense of a difficult site with what first appeared to be contradictory evidence.

Today was mainly finishing off: refilling the trenches with the stone, subsoil, topsoil and turf we had removed. Hard physical work as opposed to slow and careful excavation. Hopefully, we left the site as we found it - a beautiful field overlooking Malham Tarn (with the occasional bump where we buried a fellow archaeologist).

I'd like to thank all fellow IAG members for their friendship and support throughout the fortnight.



I'd also like to thank Chris, Bob and Sarah for providing lots of excellent photographs.



Day 9 of the excavation  
Thursday 26 May 2016

### Nearly there

Started with a misty morning with constant fine drizzle, but it cleared to a fine day and we worked through to the end.

Work was confined to two trenches today: one over the kiln and one in the centre of one of the iron age roundhouses. (Note: 'roundhouse' is all one word - not the two I wrote yesterday). Finds of charcoal and flint (and chert) continue to surface, offering more chances of dating material and proof of human intervention in terms of 'importing' useful stone.



OK, so everyone makes a mistake once in a while. One of today's tasks was to draw a plan of the trench over the sow kiln. This involves putting a grid over the trench to aid the production of an accurate scale drawing. When the excavation leader asks for a volunteer to do the drawing, most IAG members suddenly get busy (in the opposite direction) going to the loo, cleaning a find, closely inspecting a molehill, polishing their trowel or thinking hard about what to have for tea that evening.

I'm not saying it's difficult, but:

- you need to be over 7 feet tall (to see directly over the grid and down at right angles onto the bottom of the trench)
- you need to have three hands, one to hold your pencil and two to hold your drawing board
- you must be careful where you tread or you might ruin the very thing you are trying to record (and you might fall into the trench)
- you must be incredibly accurate at all times



So I thought I'd help and take a photo of the bottom of the trench, to give assistance to my colleague who was brave enough to volunteer. I stuck my phone out over the grid and tried to take the picture at arm's length. No joy. I tried again and the resulting picture looked

nothing like the bottom of a kiln, more like a picture of the sky! One of my more observant colleagues then told me I was holding my phone (camera) upside down. There are times when being stupid is quite funny. Fortunately, this was one of them. Or at least, my colleagues seemed to think so.

More surveying away from the trenches today. We're trying to identify features in the wider Chapel Fell which we haven't excavated, with the aid of the list from the HER (see day 5 of the excavation).

So far, we've identified:

- a third roundhouse close to the chapel
- a bank close to that roundhouse
- four more roundhouses up on the hill to the west of our excavations
- two banks: one close to one of the roundhouses up on the hill and one a little further away
- a dry valley (perhaps one which once provided fresh water to the site?)
- two large enclosures and two buildings about 200 metres north-west of the 'Chapel'

With good weather, we'll finish recording all the features tomorrow, with the exception of the last set on the list. A couple of us will probably have to return to the site next week to finish off this measurement. Once surveyed, we'll identify the features with map references and inform the HER of our findings.

Oh, and if anyone is wondering what 'chert' is (as I was) it's a type of stone with properties similar to flint, in that it can be worked into useful tool shapes. It's not quite as hard as flint, but can be found within limestone deposits. This means it would have to travel a shorter distance to get to Chapel Fell than flint, which is usually found in chalk deposits.

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Day 8 of the excavation  
Wednesday 25 May 2016

### Waiting for rain

OK. So I suppose it was too much to expect a fine, sunny day two days in a row. I set off from home fully expecting to be rained off all day. The weather forecast said heavy rain from 10am onwards, so the chances of doing much work on Chapel Fell were slim to nothing.



In fact, we worked through to half past two, when the heavy rain finally arrived.

The sow kiln trench continues to produce small finds. 'Sow' is apparently a corruption of the word 'sough', which is a north-east dialect word meaning 'rough'.



At one time, every large construction project - be it a large house, a bridge or a church - would have an associated kiln to burn limestone. The lime produced would be used to make lime mortar to aid the building process.

The burnt limestone (pictured left) is proof we are excavating such a kiln. This small find goes alongside many finds of charcoal from the same trench.

A charcoal find can be used for dating the level of the trench where it was found (carbon dating). If charcoal is found in the foundations of a building, it's reasonable to assume the date of the charcoal corresponds to the date of construction. In this way, we can gain scientific evidence for the age of buildings.

We have to be careful not to touch the charcoal with our hands once it's been spotted.

The dating process will pick up the smallest residue, and it would be a shame to ruin a sample simply by picking it up with our fingers.



Such finds are sent off to labs (at some expense) for testing. Needless to say, we wait patiently for the results.

The trench across the rim and into the round house continues. Typical finds (we hope) would include flint - not found locally and would have to be 'imported' - and charcoal - for dating purposes.

It's quite easy to say "This is an iron-age roundhouse" simply by looking at it. We hope to provide scientific evidence to back up such a statement.



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Day 7 of the excavation  
Tuesday 24 May 2016

**What a lovely day - not a cloud in the sky**

Our usual baggage list - waterproofs, tough boots, trowel, kneeler, sandwiches, flask, folding chair - is incomplete. We now need to add water and sun-block. Sunshine in Malham in May?

We had a number of visitors to the site today. It's good to think that others outside IAG have interest in what we're doing, whether they've made a special journey or just happened to be passing by on their journey through North Yorkshire.

One new trench today - across one of the iron age round houses. Several bits of continuing work - the kiln, the surveying of the hillside



and the measurements within the quarry.

We usually call anything of interest found on an archaeological site a 'small find'. After the metalwork found by our colleague today, perhaps we should rename this a 'large find'.



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Day 6 of the excavation  
Monday 23 May 2016

### **A sow kiln**

Fine nearly all day with rain stopping play at around 3.45.

A new week with new challenges: we started a new trench around the sow kiln (nothing to do with pigs), excavated a little deeper in the test pit within one of the round houses, and attempted to measure how much material had come from the quarry next to the 'chapel'.

We also had a visit from a micro-biologist, wanting to take core samples from the kiln. Looking for bacteria.

More news on the 'chapel': A visitor to the excavation last Friday told us that there were records of an 'incomplete chapel' from the time just before the Civil War. The construction of a local chapel - probably halted through a compulsory call to arms of the local, able-bodied men - was possibly of Protestant origin, not Roman Catholic as originally thought. More later.







Deciding on the amount of material dug out of the local quarry (just a few metres away from the 'chapel') meant taking measurements of the hillside and estimating the difference between what is still there, and what was once there before quarrying started. Not an easy task, and one for an expert in 3D trigonometry. Unfortunately, we don't have an expert in 3D trigonometry on site, so I got the job - one of the consequences of not having much surveying to do today.

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Day 5 of the excavation  
Friday 20 May 2016

**The end of the first week of  
our excavation at Chapel Fell**

A wet start (thank you BBC weather forecast), but the rest of the day was fine - mostly.

A quiet day, with note taking, drawing, photography and measurement. The mood changes on days like this: most of the time is quiet, with concentration taking over from conversation.

There were a couple of new areas of work: a test pit was dug where an anomaly was noted - by the initial magnetometry survey of the site - and an exploration of the wider Chapel Fell to locate sites identified through HER (Historic Environment Records).

The test pit revealed a piece of metalwork (hurrah) but not of historic interest (boo). However, it also revealed samples of flint - something not native to the local area.



Map references held at the HER identified the features we were already working on, but also referred to features higher up the Fell, to the north and to the west. We used a GPS locator to find the map references and confirmed a number of other potential sites of archaeological interest. It must be said that some of the map references were a little inaccurate, so the least we can do is send an updated list back to HER.

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Day 4 of the excavation  
Thursday 19 May 2016

### **A foggy start to the day**

A poor start, but fine weather from late morning through to about 3.30. Then the rain came, so we packed up a little early.

Given that we are excavating a site visited before, we'd like to be referring to detailed plans made earlier. Unfortunately, the excavation in the 1960's left little permanent record, so it's up to us to record our endeavours, and make sure they are available to others in the future.

Arthur Raistrick tells us he found a dais (a raised area where one might find an altar) at the east end of the 'chapel', followed by a 'cobbled floor'. We have found neither. This doesn't mean that Raistrick was wrong, it might mean we're excavating an area where material was removed in the 1960s dig.

We started out with the intention of trying to confirm or correct Raistrick's findings, but at the moment we can do neither. The best we can do is describe what we've found in as much detail as we can.

So today was mainly about making detailed records. Photos, measurements, drawn plans were taken, made and constructed.

As little surveying was needed today (my current role is apprentice surveyor) I was given the intriguing task of doing more mole hill sifting. My colleague and I repeatedly came across small pieces of limestone. Is it a shard of pottery?! No, it's a piece of limestone :-( Sadly, the most exciting things I found were ladybirds and spiders.

Once again, thanks to Muriel for an excellent serving of cake. The ginger cake was superb! Many thanks!



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Day 3 of the excavation  
Wednesday 18 May 2016

### **Digging in the wet**

And the rain came. As forecast, it rained for most of Tuesday night / Wednesday early morning. It drizzled a little until lunchtime, but after lunch we were back to fine weather and an occasional bit of sunshine.

Excavating in wet ground is tricky. One of the clues we look for is a change in the colour of the soil we are excavating. Not easy when everything is soaking wet.

Once everything started to dry out (including us), things got a little easier and spirits rose.

The rise in spirits was enhanced by an excellent serving of cake - made and brought to us by fellow IAG member Muriel. Many thanks!



It was mainly a day of consolidation - making sense of what we had uncovered so far, discussing the true purpose of the 'chapel' and trying to distinguish 'rubble', 'cobble', 'back fill' and 'tumble'.

The afternoon brought something new to me: sifting mole hills! Apparently, this industrious little mammal has the habit of clearing its network of tunnels of sharp objects - hence our wish to go through the mole hills to see if any objects of interest had been turned out.

The confusing difference in levels within the 'chapel' began to reduce as it became clear there was a great amount of rubble within the structure. This came from either the original walls falling in, or from 'back fill' from a previous excavation - Chapel Fell was investigated in the 1960s but, unfortunately, detailed records of the dig have been hard to locate.

Dating evidence (in the form of charcoal) has been retrieved from within the structure of the 'chapel', so (hopefully) carbon dating should tell us the period of its construction.

The two pictures below show the site in 1985, and today. Notice how the tops of the walls of the 'chapel' were still visible in the 1980s, but only show now where we have removed turf and topsoil. I wonder how long it would be before evidence of the site disappeared from view completely?

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Day 2 of the excavation  
Tuesday 17 May 2016

**A little cooler than yesterday  
but still fine and rain free**

An interesting and puzzling day:  
the two trenches started  
yesterday to investigate  
diagonally opposite corners of  
the 'chapel' produced  
inconsistent results.

One would expect a chapel to  
be built carefully, with level  
floors and good quality  
stonework. Each corner of the  
'chapel' (as in 'Chapel' Fell)  
seems to be way out of level  
with the other. A chapel with  
diagonal steps? Hardly.

The quality of the inside of the  
'chapel' simply doesn't look  
good enough - but are we just  
looking at the mess made by a  
previous excavation?

We started a test pit to  
investigate an anomaly identified  
through metal detecting back in  
March.

We also started a small pit to  
investigate the doorway. The  
apparent doorway into the  
building seems too small to  
accommodate livestock, so if it  
isn't a chapel, then it doesn't  
appear to be a building for  
animals either.

Keeps us thinking.

Look out for puzzled brows in the photos....



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Day 1 of the excavation  
Monday 16 May 2016

### **How many people does it take to put up a tent?**

Arrived at the site in glorious sunshine to find most of my colleagues had already got there, and were trying to erect a mess tent. That was the most strenuous activity of the day, and only took about half an hour! how many IAG members does it take etc. etc?

David, our intrepid leader, gave us a briefing, telling us how Arthur Raistrick surveyed the site in the 1960's, and how we were going to verify (or disprove) his findings.



We marked out two trenches on corners of the 'chapel' remains and commenced the excavation. Colleagues cleared turf, topsoil and loose stones. The structure of the 'chapel' quickly became clear.

For some reason, the two new trenches were called 'Trench 3' and 'Trench 4'. Perhaps someone will tell me why tomorrow.

The work rate was helped by excellent weather throughout the day, and excellent progress was made. By the end of the day we had:

- marked out and started two trenches
- cleared turf and some topsoil and loose stones from the trenches
- marked out and surveyed the (probable) sow kiln
- marked out and surveyed the quaried area North of the trenches
- and built a mess tent

Here's hoping that tomorrow will be as successful.

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Preparatory work  
Monday 25 April 2016

### **More surveying**

On the 25th of April, colleagues continued the tape and offset surveying of the site, with the addition of a further Total Station survey.

The features identified and flagged were carefully measured within the grids set out in March. Once measured, drawings onto graph paper were produced, alongside maps created from the Total Station.



Needless to say, the weather at Chapel Fell is 'changeable'. We started in glorious sunshine, and finished in hail.

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Preparatory work  
Friday 22 April 2016

### **Surveying round houses**

On the 22nd of April, colleagues marked out the visible features within the grids marked out in March. We concentrated on three features which have the appearance of round houses.

Flags were then placed to identify the outer, middle and inner extent of these three. The positions of these flags are being measured to produce scale drawings.



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Preparatory work  
Sunday 27 March 2016

**Site plan**

Aerial view of the Chapel Fell site. The purple dots represent the planned extent of the excavation area. The red dots represent the external extent of the existing chapel.

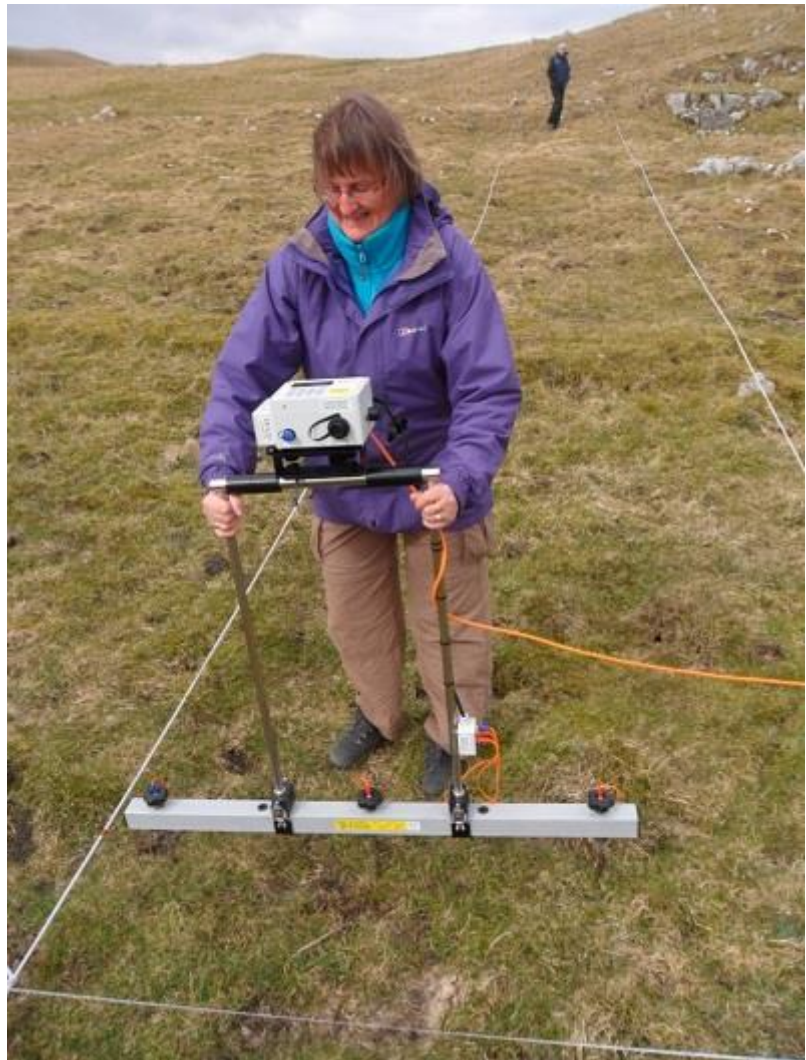


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Preparatory work  
Sunday, 20 March 2016

**Resistivity**

Resistivity Surveying at Chapel  
Fell





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Preparatory work  
Saturday 19 March 2016

**Magnetometry**  
Magnetometry Surveying at  
Chapel Fell.

