

What was it like to participate in your first excavation?

Participating in my first excavation was amazing. During my undergrad, and especially my masters, I studied archaeological theory and methodology from a purely history perspective. This excavation really put a lot of these theories and methods into perspective for me, especially landscape archaeology theories like place theory, which I use heavily in my research. Additionally, my MA was very osteology heavy, and the time I was able to spend in the bioarchaeology lab helped me understand the process of coming to the data I read in my MA.

Site Questions

Where is the site/info about the site/set the scene

The site is at Lindores Abbey in Newburgh, Fife, Scotland. This is an 12th century Tironensian monastery that was founded by David, Earl of Huntingdon in 1191 as a daughter house to Kelso Abbey located in Kelso which lies close to the Scotland-England border. The abbey now lies in ruins, with many of its walls completely crumbled. However, the remaining walls still mark the general layout of the site, with the cloister clear in the center and the large nave along the north side of the site. An interesting thing to note is that Lindores would have had a double cloister during the height of occupation. Now, the second cloister is no longer visible, but is thought to have been on the other side of the road which divides the abbey from the modern whisky distillery.



The Lindores site looking into the cloister from over one of its exterior walls.

When is the occupation period / what period is your excavation during? Who lived or worked on the site?

Lindores was founded in 1191 and was a functioning abbey until 1566 when it was taken over by a comendator. The last abbot of the abbey was John Philip (1523-66), who was abbot when the abbey was sacked by Protestant reformers in 1543 and again in 1549. In 1566, John Leslie became the first Comendator of Lindores (1566-8). Our team found a seal, believed to belong to Leslie, as it bore his coat of arms! You can read a UK news article about the find here:

<https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25373821.artefact-uncovered-lindores-abbey-teams-find-year/>

Here is a site photo of the seal (**CANNOT BE USED FOR CIRCULATION**):



Here is an illustration of Leslie's seal for comparison:



There were several comendators at Lindores before it was completely abandoned. Much of the masonry and material of the abbey has since been incorporated into the town of Newburgh and the farmhouse which sits next to the abbey.



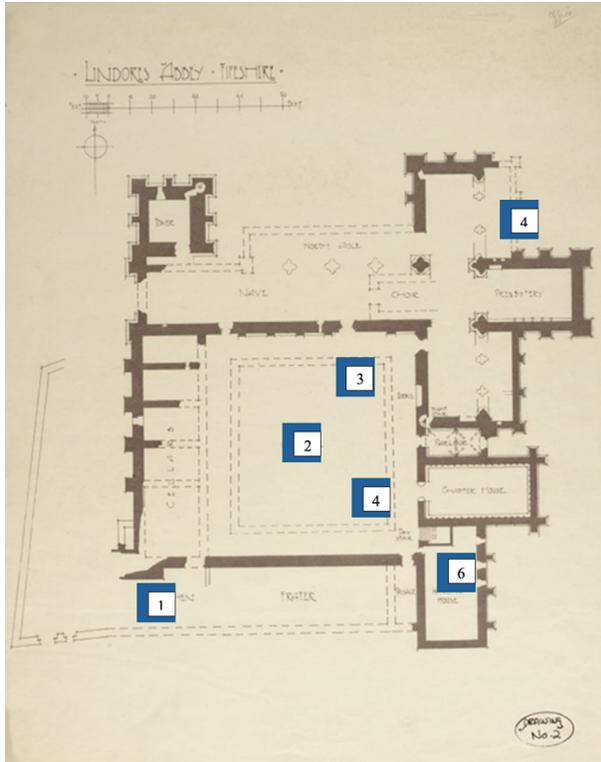
Roof feature from the abbey which is now part of the farmhouse. (The current farmhouse owners are also the owners and founders of the Lindores Abbey Distillery. They really value the heritage of the Lindores site and are really excellent landowners to work with!!! We owe it all to them, really.)

While the abbey was still functioning, it was run by Tironensian monks. The Tironensian order was a monastic order that followed the teachings of Bernard of Tiron (1046-1117 AD). Bernard aligned with a larger monastic reform movement that sought to return monastic life to its core values of religious poverty, labour, and solitude. However, Bernard preferred a life of hermitage and founded a new monastery at Tiron, France, in 1109. Like many contemporary orders, the Tironensians followed the Rule of St. Benedict. However, Bernard aligned with a larger monastic reform movement that sought to return monastic life to its core values of religious poverty, labour, and solitude. Therefore, the Tironensians lived a life with greater emphasis on manual labour and abstinence in food and drink, which initially resulted from extreme virtuous poverty. The Tironensians were extremely devoted to industrial production of agricultural and material goods.

This site is also believed to be the ‘birth place’ of whisky. The current distillery refers to the site as the “Spiritual Home of Scotch Whisky,” as there is a reference to “aqua vitae” in a 1494 manuscript (*Rotuli scaccarii regum scotorum* Vol X, p. 487): “*To Brother John Cor, by order of the King, to make aqua vitae VIII bolls of malt.*” According to the distillery, 8 bolls is enough malt to make 350 litres of spirits. This suggests the distilling of some type of spirit on at least a semi-industrial scale at this time.

Get specific, if you’re on a massive site, tell us about the specific location of the active excavation. And/or tell us specifically about what you worked on.

During our excavation, we had 6 trenches open. I dug in trench One which was in the Kitchen of the abbey. This was the second year of five on the site, and each year there will be different trench locations based on anomalies picked up in the geo surveying which was done in 2014. The main purpose of the dig is to answer questions about the water usage in the site. Trench 4 picked up a potential portion of a drain, but the anomaly in Trench 2, which was thought to be a well, turned out to be unrelated to water use. My trench, Trench 1, was only a third of the size they originally planned and was unrelated to water use.



De-sodding trench 2.



The sealed arch of what we believed to be the main drain out of the abbey and into the River Tay which would have come right up to the abbey wall during the medieval period. The Tay now runs about 500m away from the abbey.

During the Victorian period, a man named Alexander Laing tried to beautify the Lindores site but landscaping it. To do so, he moved all the remaining rubble that was littering the site and pushed it into where the kitchen and refectory were. This meant that Trench 1, aka my trench, had to work through 1.5 meters of rubble before we found anything medieval. This also meant that the remaining 5 trenches got to the medieval layer very quickly since their top layers were all piled into the kitchen/refectory. As a result, we did not hit medieval material until the very end of the third week! Then, on the second last day, we FINALLY found a feature which turned into a beautiful door opening for the kitchen.



A heart around the feature when we first found it. There is also a small piece of pottery towards the middle of the sondage.



The feature on the following day (from discovery). We revealed more of it and defined it better, exposing the side of a wall.



Our trench on the final day of excavation.

More Trench 1 pics:





The inukshuk I built to watch over our trench.





Dig Life

Key staff/supervisors you worked with (give credit to trench supervisors, directors, finds staff, anyone who gave lessons)

Dr. Alison Beach (University of St. Andrews) – Programme Coordinator, instructor, trench 4 supervisor

Dr. Darlene Brooks-Hedstrom (Brandeis University) – Lead archaeologist, Instructor, trench 1 supervisor

Dr. Kimm Curran – Heritage and engagement lead, trench 2 supervisor

Derek Hall (Independent Archaeological Contractor) – Instructor, site manager, head archaeologist

Irene Hallyburton – trench 2 supervisor

Calum Muir – trench 3 and 5 supervisor

Xan Wojie – trench 6 supervisor

Friar John Claw and Vesper – the two farm cats who are honorary site supervisors.



Dr. Beach showing us how to use the maddock properly.



Derek overlooking the site!



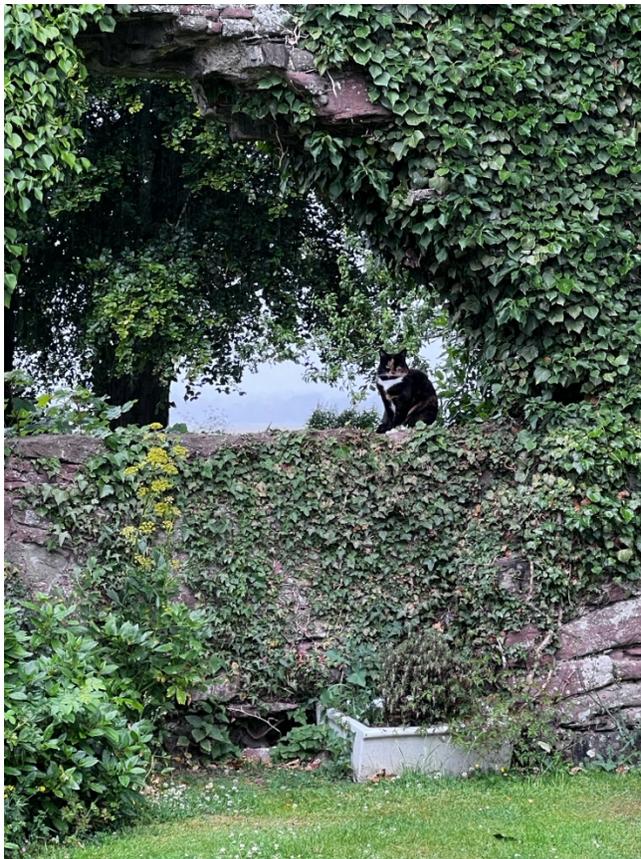
Friar John Claw (FJC) disturbing the archaeology of trench 1 during the first week. This is also a good view of where we started with trench 1.



FJC interrupting teatime for pets (notice the temptations packet in the bottom of the picture – he got many treats from us!)



FJC in for some post-lunch love.



Vesper was not as people-y, so she watched the site from a distance.

Daily schedule

8:00 – arrive at breakfast at David Russell Apartments in St. Andrews

8:30 – Taxi ride to site
9:00 – arrive at site and set up marquees and trench tents for the day, gather all tools and supplies from tool shed
9:30 – Either attend lecture or start digging!
11:00– tea break! (classic UK activities)
11:30 – back to digging
12:30 – lunch
13:30 – back to digging or lecture
15:00 – short break
15:15 – back to digging
16:30 – site clean up and walkthrough
17:00 – taxis back to St.Andrews



Tea time!

Special instruction or research opportunities, hands-on skills learned?

We had 3 classroom lecture days, 4 site lecture days, and 3 lab-based days. On the lab days, we had a choice of archives, manuscripts, or bioarchaeology. I opted for the bioarch labs! During this time we got to get hands on experience with osteology including the anatomy of a skeleton, and how to age and sex a skeleton.

Being that my MA was on the Ridgeway Hill mass grave (a 10th/11th century decapitation grave in Dorset, UK), I was able to view a skeleton which showed clear signs of decapitation.



Me, ready for a bioarch lab.

First experiences Outside of dig life (opportunities to explore, team bonding, field trips, lectures etc.)

We had a field trip day to Arbroath Abbey on June 20. This was also a double-cloister abbey and was likely a similar layout to what Lindores was.



We went to the Highland Games on June 28.



We mainly had weekends free to do what we wanted. I mainly explored St. Andrews and the beaches there.

I also rented a vehicle with one of the other girls on the dig and we drove up to Inverness through the Scottish Highlands on our first weekend there. We stopped at every standing stone we could get to with a car!

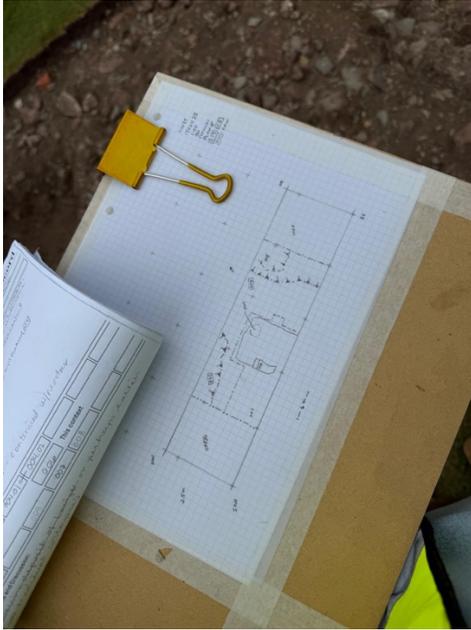
Post Dig thoughts

Do you hope to go back (or dig elsewhere)?

I definitely got the digging itch that I will need to scratch for the rest of my life. I get the feeling I will be doing archaeology for the next several summers for sure. I will likely go to Turkey to dig at Çadır Höyük with my secondary supervisor Dr. Marica Cassis in the 2026 season. Perhaps I can attend the field school at Lindores as an intern in June-July 2026 as well. Dr. Allison Beach has also invited me to attend her field school at Dalheim, Germany in May 2026. But that is a lot of archaeology for one year and my primary supervisor probably wouldn't appreciate me being gone the whole summer since I do have a PhD dissertation to start!

What skills have you learned from the experience?

I learned field skills of how to actually use archaeological tools, how to draw, how to take levels, how to document finds, how to clean finds, etc. Since this field school was primarily undergraduate students in their first summer of undergrad, I also fell into a bit of a leadership role among the students. I already had strong leadership skills, but living with these students and spending all day in the trench with them helped me to relate to them more and understand struggles that undergrad students face today, especially with the rise of AI.



How do you plan to integrate the experience into your academic pathway/career?

Impact of scholarship funds

I will continue to go on dig through the summers of my degree and hope to get as much field experience as I can to broaden my job prospects into archaeology as well. I come from a History-heavy background, so field experience will help open more doors career wise for me.