

Angela Weiler

July 30, 2025

Vindolanda Field School Report

This past spring, I had the privilege to be a part of Western University's Vindolanda Field School. Over the course of four weeks, I learned the basics of excavation and post-excavation at the Roman military fort and settlement of Vindolanda, located in Northern Britain just south of Hadrian's wall on the Stanegate Road. The Vindolanda Trust and a dedicated team of archaeologists lead ongoing research on the site and its history, and they offer the amazing opportunity for members of the public and students (like me!) to help excavate. Currently, their research is focused on the northeast quadrant of the fort, uncovering the stone structures built during the third and fourth centuries CE.

For the first few weeks, I was stationed in the rampart area along the eastern side of the fort. Along the rampart, we worked towards revealing the *intervallum* road, one of the fort's major roads. We found lots of "everyday" items, like pottery sherds and a spindle whorl, which may have been discarded in the rampart or left behind in the road. During my time on the rampart, I got to work with our amazing TA, Cheyenne, and learn how to tell the difference between pottery sherds and rock (which seemed so difficult at the beginning of the program, but a walk in the park by the end!), how to read the soil and see the different stratigraphic layers, how to document my day of excavation, and how to keep my area of the trench level and clean.

During the last two weeks of the program, I moved areas and helped excavate the rooms of a fourth-century barrack block! We primarily worked on uncovering the different levels of floor, and I spent lots of time cleaning the walls of the rooms, so they were clear and well defined for pictures and 3D modelling. We had a chance to work with Vanessa, a research fellow

from the University of Edinburgh, who was taking samples from each floor layer to study various data points from the soil, like the effects of climate change on the soil and how spaces were used.

Throughout my weeks on-site, I also learned how to make context sheets, how to set up and use the total station (nicknamed Elsa) to record the coordinates of small finds and to survey buildings, and how to do 3D modelling on the iPad. I also participated in some of the public outreach at the site, talking to visitors and telling them about the history the fort. This was one of my absolute favourite experiences, because I had the chance to share my passion for history and pass on the things I had learned to visitors; I especially loved when school groups would come, because I got to speak to young students, not unlike myself, who had so much curiosity and excitement about the site!

Additionally, I had several chances to work with the post-excavation team, where I learned how to wash, sort, and catalogue the bulk finds, like pottery sherds and bones. Working on post-excavation helped me improve my skills of pottery identification and gave me the opportunity to learn more about pottery importation and production on the Roman frontier. Post-excavation work also allowed me to get a comprehensive look at the bulk finds from each context, and thus gain a broad idea of what types of activity took place in each location.

In the evenings after excavation and on weekends, we spent our time learning about different aspects of archaeology and the history of Roman Britain through lectures, museum visits, and hikes along Hadrian's Wall. We had several incredible guest lectures, including one on numismatics and the Vindolanda coin collection by Dr. Fae Amiro, and one on biological archaeology with Dr. Trudi Buck. Our field school professors, Dr. Elizabeth Greene and Dr. Alexander Meyer, gave us in-depth tours of various museums, exhibits, and important sites

around the area (some of my favourites being on the Vindolanda shoe collection, the Vindolanda writing tablets, and the Housesteads Roman Fort). We also had the opportunity to learn from each other, as each field school student gave a presentation on different sites and artefacts related to Hadrian's Wall or Vindolanda! We even had one free weekend to explore, so I took the opportunity to visit York and Manchester to experience the incredible John Rylands Research Institute and enjoy some beautiful Pre-Raphaelite art at the Manchester Art Gallery.

The Vindolanda Field School was truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and I am so grateful to everyone who helped me make this vital step in pursuing archaeology and Classical Studies. I not only learned so much about excavation and the history of Roman Britain, but I also made so many friendships and memories with my fellow students and volunteers. I would like to say a sincere thank you to the Archaeological Institute of America and all those whose generosity make the Jane C. Waldbaum Archaeological Field School Scholarships possible; I could not have had this opportunity without your support! I would also like to say thank you to Dr. Greene, Dr. Meyer, Cheyenne, Dr. Birley, Dr. Alberti, Rebecca, Christina, and everyone on the Vindolanda team; I am so grateful for your hard work. Thank you for helping me be a small part of the Vindolanda excavation!





The rim of a black burnished ware pot found in the rampart area!



A sherd of a Samian mortarium (i.e., mortar and pestle) found in the barrack block. The rough inside surface helped grind materials.



Me with a mattock after a session of removing topsoil!



Bulk finds drying after being washed in post-excavation, including sherds of Samian ware and black burnished ware decorated with patterns.



