

## THE CERNE ABBEY RESEARCH PROJECT, UNITED KINGDOM

**Course ID: HIS 489**

**July 14-August 10, 2024**

***Academic Credits: 8 Semester Credit Units (Equivalent to 12 Quarter Units)***

***School of Record: Culver Stockton College***

### **DIRECTOR:**

**Dr. Hugh Willmott** – Senior Lecturer, European Historical Archaeology, University of Sheffield  
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### **PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

Founded in 987 CE by Æthelmaer the Stout on the site of an earlier Christian community, Cerne Abbey grew to become one of the most important monasteries in the Southwest of England. Shortly after its closure during the Dissolution in 1539, the site was comprehensively demolished save for a gatehouse, and the precise location of its buildings was lost until archaeological work started in 2022. The abbey sits at the feet of the famous chalk-cut figure of a club-wielding giant that dominates the village of Cerne Abbas. Recent dating of the figure by the UK National Trust has shown that the giant was an Anglo-Saxon creation, and it seems directly connected to the earliest monks residing there.

Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) survey undertaken by the University of Sheffield provided the first ever evidence for the medieval abbey, and potentially its Anglo-Saxon predecessor beneath. This survey clearly shows the location of the monastic cloister, measuring c. 20x20m internally, and its west, east, and north ranges. Within the cloister garth and abutting the north cloister walk are the clear foundations of an octagonal conduit house and, externally to the northeast of the cloister, the rather more ephemeral buildings almost certainly represent remains of the monastic infirmary. The GPR survey also demonstrated that a significant portion of the monastic church lies within an open area unobscured by later features and available for excavation. Not only do we now have an amazingly clear plan of the cloistral ranges, the survey showed that the buildings remained surprisingly intact with walls up to over 1m in places.

Small-scale excavations in 2023 started to investigate these results, with a trench located over the southwest corner of the cloister, which identified the transept and north aisle of the monastic church. We are now expanding this to start to answer a set of interrelated questions concerning the life of the abbey and its ultimate destruction in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Key aims to be addressed in 2024:

- *Identifying evidence for the pre-Conquest monastery and earlier activity on site*  
Work to date has confirmed the historical presence of the Saxon monastery, through ceramics and finds. However, in this season the project will focus on an area of the cloister that is relatively undisturbed by later buildings to attempt to find structural evidence for the first monastic community.
- *Ascertaining the precise orientation and size of the church*  
Whilst the layout of the cloister is clear from the geophysical survey, the form and orientation of the church is obscured by the overlying deposits of rubble and demolition debris. The excavation will expand the area of excavation in the area of the north aisle so that its wider plan can be reconstructed through comparison to other known churches of the same date.
- *Characterizing the development of the cloistral ranges*  
The GPR survey clearly shows that the late medieval cloister consists of several phases of redevelopment and expansion, yet for the geophysical data alone these cannot be dated or fully understood. Excavation will incorporate part of the cloister so that the sequence of rebuilding can be observed and better interpreted.
- *Understanding the impact of the Dissolution and later developments on the site*  
After its closure by Henry VIII, the monastery was rapidly demolished and just forty years later its very location was subject to some legal debate. Consequently, there is little understanding of how its dissolution occurred or what happened to the site later. We will pay particular attention to the 16<sup>th</sup>-century and later phases of the excavation, looking for evidence of dismantling and recycling of materials, and identifying any subsequent uses the buildings were put to.

#### IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER

The Center for Field Sciences was established to support field training in a range of sciences at sites across the world. Traveling and conducting field work involves risk. Students interested in participating in any CFS program must weigh the potential risk against the value of education provided for the program sites of their choosing.

Risk is inherent in everything we do and the CFS takes risk seriously. A committee of leading scholars review each field school location prior to approval. Once a program is accepted, the CFS continually monitor conditions at the program site, its academic quality and ability to conduct as safe of an experience as possible.

The CFS does not provide trip or travel cancellation insurance. Students are encouraged to explore such insurance policies on their own. Post Covid 19, most basic policies do not cover trip cancelation due to pandemics. If you wish to purchase an insurance policy that cover such contingencies, explore Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) plans. [Insuremytrip.com](https://www.insuremytrip.com), [Squaremouth.com](https://www.squaremouth.com) or [Travelguard.com](https://www.travelguard.com) are possible websites where students may explore different insurance policies.

You should be aware that conditions in the field are different than those you experience in your home, dorms or college town. You will be exposed to the elements, live in rustic accommodation, and expect to engage in physical activity daily.

We do our best to follow schedule and activities as outlined in this syllabus. Yet local permitting agencies, political, environmental, personal, or weather conditions may force changes. This syllabus, therefore, is only a general commitment. Students should allow flexibility and adaptability as research work is frequently subject to change.

All students must consult medical professionals to ensure they are fit to participate in this program. If you have any medical concerns, please consult your doctor. For all other concerns, please consult with the program director – as appropriate.

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## COURSE OBJECTIVES

This project will provide the exciting experience of participating on one of the most important medieval projects currently being undertaken in the United Kingdom. Students will be at the heart of the project, participating in all the core survey, excavation and analysis elements in the field. Guided and supported by experienced practitioners at every step, students will gain real-world experience of a cutting-edge excavation on an internationally important site. It is also our intention to teach not only archaeological techniques but also involve students in the continuous dialogue that develops during the course of the excavation so they can see how methodologies develop to adapt to the new challenges presented on an often daily basis.

The aims of the program are:

- Provide an introduction to, and experience of, the most up-to-date methods in academic and commercial archaeology.
- Enable students to gain an understanding of how archaeologists develop methodologies to achieve specific research aims, and how these adapt in the field.
- Introduce students to challenges and possibilities of medieval archaeology in Europe.
- Provide transferable skills that are relevant to both archaeological and other vocations.

## LEARNT SKILLS

We are aware that many students may not seek academic careers but will pursue employment in the private sector. To that end, we are following the Twin Cairns Skills Log Matrix™ (<https://twincairns.com/skill-set-matrix/>) and will provide training for the following skills:

Skill	Skill Definition
Artifact Processing	Ability to identify, collect and record a wide range of artifact types, understanding their relative fragility within different site types and conditions
Artifact Recovery	Ability to record, safely excavate and properly storage artifacts and ecofacts made of different types of materials (ceramics, metal, lithics, etc.) and various level of fragility
Artifact Washing	Ability to wash different artifact types while maintaining their material characteristics for research purposes
GPS recording	Ability to record and attribute points, lines, & polygons using a GPS receiver.
Grid & Trench Layout	Ability to lay accurate grid and generate reliable trench outline for excavations
Large Hand Tools	Can operate a mattock, shovel, hoe, or similar large hand tool to conduct excavations
Photography	Ability to take clear images of various feature, artifact & soil colors at various light and field depth conditions
Recording Sheets	Ability to understand and properly record excavation process, stratigraphy, sections and artifact documentation
Recording-Excavations	Ability to understand, collect and record all excavation process and data
Screening	Ability to use geological and general screens to identify, collect and record small scale finds
Section Drawing	Ability to understand concepts of physical and chronological stratigraphy and the method to record those accurately
Small Hand Tools	Can operate a trawl or similar small hand tool to conduct excavations

Soil Identification	Ability to identify, describe and record different types of soil and depositions
Understanding Stratigraphy	Ability to understand the relationships between layers of both cultural and natural depositions

## COURSE SCHEDULE

Work is undertaken Monday to Friday and Saturday morning. Saturday afternoon and Sundays are free time when students can rest or take the opportunity to explore the local area.

Twice week, on Tuesday and Thursday evenings, there will be lectures given by members of the project team.

Course structure may be subject to change upon directors' discretion.

## TYPICAL WORKDAY

### Monday to Friday

8.00-8.30am	Breakfast
8.40am	Walk to site (10 minutes)
9:00-10:45am	Program Activities - Field or Lab
10:45-11.00am	Break
11:00am-12:45pm	Program Activities - Field or Lab
12:45-1.15pm	Lunch
1:15-3:00pm	Program Activities - Field or Lab
3:00-3:15pm	Break
3:15-5:00pm	Program Activities - Field or Lab
5:00pm	Walk to camp (10 minutes)
7:00pm	Dinner
8:00pm	Lecture (Tuesdays and Thursdays only)

### Saturday morning

8.00-8.30am	Breakfast
8.40am	Walk to site (10 minutes)
9:00-10:45am	Program Activities - Field or Lab
10:45-11.00am	Break
11:00am-12:45pm	Program Activities - Field or Lab
12:45-1.15pm	Lunch

### Saturday afternoon and Sunday

Free time, meals still provided.

In case of rainy days, lectures and lab work will be performed.

## ACADEMIC GRADING MATRIX

Students will be graded based on their work as follows:

**60% Participation:** Active and enthusiastic involvement in the field school. Attendance of all mandatory learning activities and contribution to the academic aims of the project. Demonstrating a collegiate attitude and facilitating the smooth running of the excavation both on and off site.

**40% Skills passport:** Throughout the project students will complete the UK *Archaeology Skills Passport* (<http://www.archaeologyskills.co.uk>). This documents the range of activities undertaken, and performance is assessed by project staff. The skills and assessment criteria are directly comparable to the Twin Cairns Skills Log Matrix™ (<https://twincairns.com/skill-set-matrix/>) and thus the *Archaeology Skills Passport* forms a permanent and transferable record of achievement.

## SKILLS MATRIX LEVELS

The school instructors will evaluate the level each student achieved on the list of skills provided above. Each skill will be graded on one of the following three levels:

**Basic:** Can perform the skill/task with some supervision.

**Competent:** Can perform the skill/task without any supervision.

**Advanced:** Can perform the skill/task and teach others how to do it.

## ATTENDANCE POLICY

The required minimum attendance for the successful completion of the field school is 85% of the course hours. Any significant delay or early departure from an activity will be calculated as an absence from the activity. An acceptable number of absences for medical or other personal reasons will not be taken into account if the student catches up on the field school study plan through additional readings, homework or tutorials with program staff members.

## PREREQUISITES

None. This is hands-on, experiential learning and students will study on-site how to conduct archaeological research. Field work involves physical work and exposure to the elements and thus requires a measure of understanding that this will not be the typical university learning environment. You will have to work outdoors and will get sweaty, sometimes wet and tired. Students are required to come equipped with sufficient excitement and adequate understanding that field work requires real, hard work, in the sun, wind and rain. The work requires patience, discipline, and attention to detail.

## PROGRAM ETIQUETTE

The project seeks to foster a positive and supportive atmosphere both on and off site. Accommodation is in the form of camping, but it is in the heart of a very safe village. Whilst individual privacy is guaranteed, project members are living and working communally, and it is expected that every team member respects this and contributes to all aspects of the project. Cerne Abbas is a small rural community but is welcoming to those from outside and has a good range of local amenities.

Sometimes, because of a shared language and close cultural connections, North American students assume that England is 'just like home' or what they know from television. However, it is important to realize that whilst superficially this can be case, you will almost immediately notice significant differences that may feel unsettling at first. You'll find the country and the people surprisingly diverse and often in stark contrast to the typical stereotypes presented in popular culture.

It is worth noting that Cerne Abbas sits beneath a 180ft tall hill figure of a naked and rather excited giant. The village is very proud of him, and he has been watching over them for at least 1,100 years. You should expect to see his form reproduced in a variety of places around the village, not as a rude figure intended to cause offence but as an important social and cultural icon.

## EQUIPMENT LIST

- Personal tent
- Sleeping bag (3 season recommended)
- Pillow (if you require one)
- Towel
- A waterproof raincoat
- Some warm clothes for evenings
- Lightweight pants (trousers in UK English)
- Sturdy footwear for on site
- Work gloves (if you need them)
- Hat
- Sunscreen
- Insect repellent
- Water bottle
- Vacuum flask (if you want hot drinks during break)
- Flashlight
- Notebook, pens etc.
- Any medication required

## TRAVEL & MEETING POINT/TIME

We suggest you hold purchasing your airline ticket until six (6) weeks prior to departure date. Natural disasters, political changes, weather conditions and a range of other factors may require the cancellation of a program. The CFS typically takes a close look at local conditions 6-7 weeks prior to program beginning and makes a Go/No Go decision by then. Such time frame still allows for the purchase of deeply discounted airline tickets while protecting students from potential loss of airline ticket costs if CFS is forced to cancel a program.

Students will be met at in the parking area of Dorchester South train station on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> July at 5pm. There is a Costa Coffee on the opposite side of the small square where students can wait if they arrive earlier. There are direct trains from London Waterloo station to Dorchester South (journey time c. 2hrs 43mins), and students will be transported from here to Cerne Abbas by car, 20 minutes away.

If you missed your connection or your flight is delayed, please call, text or email the project director immediately. A local emergency cell phone number will be provided to all enrolled students.

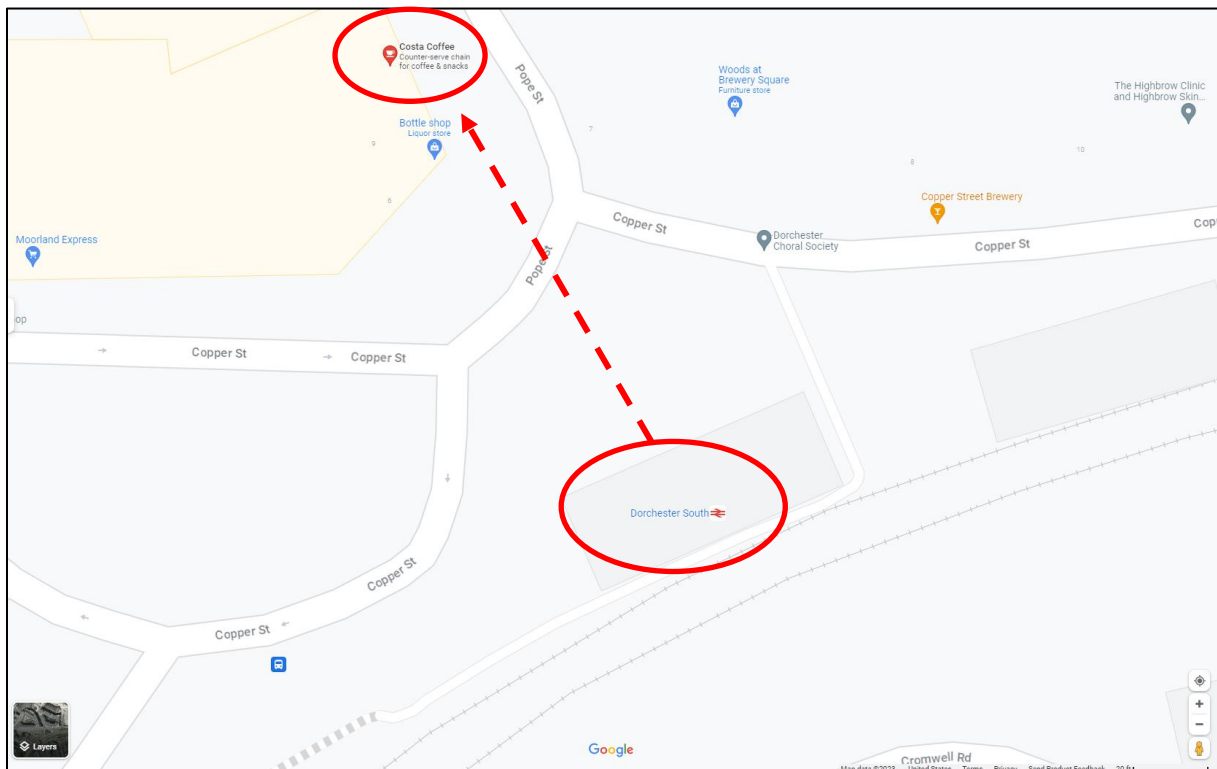


Figure 1: Map of Dorchester South train station and the Costa Coffee shop

## VISA REQUIREMENTS

There are no special visa requirements for American or Canadian citizens travelling to and staying in the United Kingdom for less than 6 months. Your passport expiration date should exceed the stay by at least 3 months. However, all participants are advised to check the latest guidance before booking flights at <https://www.gov.uk/check-uk-visa>

## MEALS & ACCOMMODATION

The project will be based at the local vicarage (4 Back Lane, Cerne Abbas, DT2 7JW), a 10 minutes' walk from the excavation site. Accommodation is in the form of camping in a private meadow to rear. Students must bring their own tent and bedding but will be provided a sturdy camp bed. There is access

to electricity for charging, WIFI and large communal tents for socializing or sheltering in the case of rain. We also have access to a large room in the vicarage which will serve as a classroom and laboratory.

Three meals are provided every day (including the days off). Breakfast and dinner are at the campsite and students prepare their own packed lunch in the morning to take on to site. We are able to cater for all kinds of dietary requirements, and there is a well-stocked village store should students wish to purchase additional items. Cerne Abbas has three pubs which serve food and a tearoom. There will be a fulltime camp cook and campsite manager to ensure the smooth running of the domestic side of the project. However, students are expected to assist these staff in the preparation food, cleaning and general campsite duties.

### **PRACTICAL INFORMATION**

**International dialing code:** +44

**Money/Banks/Credit Cards:** The currency is the British Pound (GBP). There are no banks in Cerne Abbas but cash withdrawals can be made at the Post Office which is open 9.00am-5.30pm every day except Sunday. All shops, pubs and facilities accept card payments, indeed in many places this is preferred to cash.

**ATM Availability:** There is no ATM in Cerne Abbas.

**Local Language:** English

**Measure units:** degree Celsius/centigrade (°C), meter (m.), gram (gr.), liter (l)

### **ACADEMIC CREDITS & TRANSCRIPT**

Attending students will be awarded 8 semester credit units (equivalent to 12 quarter credit units). Students will receive a letter grade for attending this field school based on the assessment matrix (above). This program provides a minimum of 160 direct instructional hours. Students are encouraged to discuss the transferability of credit units with faculty and the registrar at their home institutions prior to attending this program.

Students will be able to access their transcript through our School of Record – Culver-Stockton College. C-SC has authorized the National Student Clearinghouse to provide enrollment and degree verification (at <https://tsorder.studentclearinghouse.org/school/select>). Upon completion of a program, students will get an email from C-SC with a student ID that may be used to retrieve transcripts. The first set of transcripts will be provided at no cost, additional transcripts may require payment. If you have questions about ordering a transcript, contact the C-SC office of the registrar at [registrar@culver.edu](mailto:registrar@culver.edu).

### **REQUIRED READINGS**

PDF files of all mandatory readings will be provided to enrolled students via a shared Dropbox folder.

Blair, J., 2005. *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*. OUP Oxford (Chapter 6)

Gilchrist, R. and Green, C. 2015. *Glastonbury Abbey: Archaeological Investigations 1904–79*. Society of Antiquaries of London.

Gittos, H., 2013. *Liturgy, Architecture, and Sacred Places in Anglo-Saxon England*. Oxford University Press.

Gittos, H. 2024. 'The Cerne Giant in its early medieval context', *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies*.

Greene, J.P., 2005. *Medieval Monasteries*. Bloomsbury Publishing (Chapters 1-2).

Hutton, R.E., Darvill, T., Barker, K. and Bender, B., 1999. *The Cerne Giant: an Antiquity on Trial*. Oxford: Oxbow Books

Reynolds, A. and Turner, S., 2004. 'Discovery of a late Anglo-Saxon monastic site in Devon: Holy Trinity church, Buckfastleigh', *Archaeology International* 8, 22-5.

Willmott, H. 2020. *The Dissolution of the Monasteries in England and Wales*. Equinox Publishing (Chapters 1-3).

#### **RECOMMENDED READINGS**

Collis, J., 1996. *Digging up the past: an introduction to archaeological excavation*. The History Press.

Barker, P., 2003. *Techniques of archaeological excavation*. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) Routledge.

Rodwell, W., 2012. *The Archaeology of Churches*. Amberley Publishing Limited.

Roskams, S. 2001. *Excavation*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.