



Dr Lauren Doughton

Lauren originally visited Shetland in 2006 to undertake fieldwork for her PhD research with the University of Manchester. In 2010 she made a permanent move and spent three years working on the Shetland Place Names Project and THING Project for Shetland Amenity Trust. She completed her PhD in 2014, and spent 12 months working as a field archaeologist for ORCA on watching briefs throughout Shetland.

She now works as Marketing Manager for Shetland Arts Development Agency although she has no plans to abandon archaeology despite this change in career path. Her PhD research focussed on developing a contextualised understanding of Shetland's burnt mound sites. She is also interested in the use of art in archaeological interpretation and outreach.

Why archaeology?

If I'm honest, I don't really know. Up until the age of about 15 I was convinced I was going to go into medicine. At that point I don't think I was really aware that archaeology existed. I'd always been very interested in history, but it hadn't occurred to me that there were jobs I could do related to that interest. Then I saw Time Team for the first time and it made me realise that there were people out there who were paid to dig holes, get muddy and actually FIND all the cool stuff I read about. That really appealed to me. If I'm completely honest with myself I think it was the overwhelming enthusiasm that Phil Harding showed for every little tiny bit of anything they found that won me over. It just looked like great fun, and as it turned out, it was! I did some digs, and then went to university to study it as part of a joint honours degree, and by the end of three years I was hooked, and there was no helping me.

What is your favourite site on Shetland?

I'm probably a bit biased, but I've got to say Cruester Burnt Mound on Bressay, really. Partially because for a burnt mound it is incredibly complex and very cool and it opens up so many questions about those sites, and partly because I had such fun running the experimental firings there for my PhD research that it will always be a very special place to me. You can't spend your weekends somewhere getting burnt and smoke dried, and covered in cow fat and all sorts of other revolting things without coming out of it as a slightly different person. Without that site my PhD would have been considerably duller, and probably quite empty. I have to give special mention to the axe factory up in the Beorgs of Uyea though too - there is so much amazing archaeology just littered across the hillside up there, and it's one of my favourite walks.

What is the best thing you have ever found?

I am something of an archaeological jinx, it has to be said. I hardly ever find stuff on sites. It tends to be that I walk on site and nothing is found for weeks, and then the day I leave something amazing comes up, so I have very few very cool 'finds' despite having worked on some amazing sites. That

being said, I did once volunteer for a day on a dig in the Kilmartin Valley. I was in the area doing work for my BA dissertation, and there was another group of archaeologists from Southampton working there at the time, so I asked if I could gatecrash. I was cleaning back what looked like a cobbled platform in front of a rock art site, and there was much discussion as to whether this was intentional prehistoric cobbling, or a natural feature, or something later etc., and then I turned up a lovely quartz scraper. It allowed all the pieces to slot together, and although it might not have been the most beautiful thing to look at, it was brilliant to find.

If you could time travel to any era/answer any question, when/what would it be?

The whole idea of time travel fills me with dread. If we could go back and find out the answer, then what would the archaeologists do? I'm drawn to prehistory precisely because we have no answers to how things worked. Nothing was written down (all that historical stuff is just cheating!), so we have to use our imaginations and engage with the materials to try and unpick how things might have been. That's what I find so exciting. So, if I could, I would probably go back as far as to whoever invented time travel and un-invent it (except that would create a paradox, and the world might end!)

If you could have only one tool in the field, what would it be?

Trowel. I LOVE my trowel. I'm a poor photographer, my drawing skills are pitiful, and I'm not particularly skilled with a shovel, but I could trowel at stuff for hours. I get palpitations every time I think I've lost it (which is plenty of times) but so far I've managed to keep hold of my original one.

Do you have a song/band you use for inspiration either in the field or office?

It depends on the situation. When I was working on my MA thesis I had just bought Takk by Sigur Ros, and I played it to death while driving around Wiltshire looking at various sites. Somehow it just seemed to fit the scenery. Then when I got back home to write up, I found I could only really write properly while listening to that album, often quite loud. I suspect I annoyed my housemates quite a bit. I also went through a period writing up my PhD thesis where I would only write really well while listening to certain songs. I had days where I had to listen to the theme from Chariots of Fire on a loop, and the Superman Theme. It sounds bonkers, but it worked!

Be honest, does a part of you wish you were Indiana Jones?

NO! He is NOT an archaeologist. I have been known to get quite ranty about this...

If you could debunk one myth or misinformed idea in/about archaeology what would it be?

Other than that we are anything like Indiana Jones (see above!) I think it would be changing the perception that Burnt Mounds are boring, and unable to contribute to our understanding of prehistoric life. That was the driving concept behind my PhD. I hope I managed to succeed. You'll have to read [my thesis](#) and tell me if I did!