

ENHANCING WEST YORKSHIRE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT RECORD

July 24, 2015 Rosalind Buck Bronze Age,Curation, Digital Archaeology, Explore Posts, Iron Age, Roman,Romano-British Archaeology, historic environment, local authority, west yorkshire

Hello! My name's Ros and I work as a HER Officer for West Yorkshire Historic Environment Record (HER) and this is my second blog for Day of Archaeology. Two years ago I tried to give an overview of what a HER is, my duties, and the type of activities I get up to during a typical day as a HER Officer – you can read my last blog by clicking [here](#).

This year I thought it might be nice to give a brief overview of some types of archaeology and built heritage that we have recently been dealing with in our HER. Over the last few years there have been only two of us working within the HER, and this has meant we have mainly spent our time on customer-focused activities like answering enquiries, dealing with data requests and promoting the HER to a wider audience. This year, however, we are extremely fortunate to have an extra full-time member of our team, and as such we've been trying to make the most of this and have been cracking on with some large-scale enhancement projects. As a result we're about to hit 15,000 records on the database!



A selection of fieldwork reports that still need to be added to the HER database

The first main project has been working through our backlog of fieldwork reports. When any type of archaeological work is undertaken within West Yorkshire a copy of the final written report should be deposited with the HER so the information can be used to inform future planning decisions and research projects. The reports we hold can cover a range of archaeological activities such as watching briefs, geophysical surveys, full-scale excavations, and building recording surveys. Due to the constant fluctuating levels of staff, and often high work loads, we have accrued a sizable backlog of these fieldwork reports; some even dating back to the early-1990s! Thanks to the efforts of Rhona, our Assistant HER

Officer, this backlog has been dramatically reduced over the last six months. She has been adding about 30-40 reports a month to the database.

At the beginning of the year my colleague Jason started work on a Historic England funded project to enhance the HER's records on the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic periods. For this project he has been examining the records of antiquarian flint collectors, which are held in the archives of various local museums, and comparing this data with our records. This has involved a lot of improving existing database entries, as well as creating new records for previously unrecorded sites.



Two flints that have been analysed as part of our early Prehistoric enhancement project.

Left: Lee Moor Palaeolithic handaxe, Stanley (held at Wakefield Museum)

Right: Late Mesolithic microliths from White Hill (held at Manchester Museum)

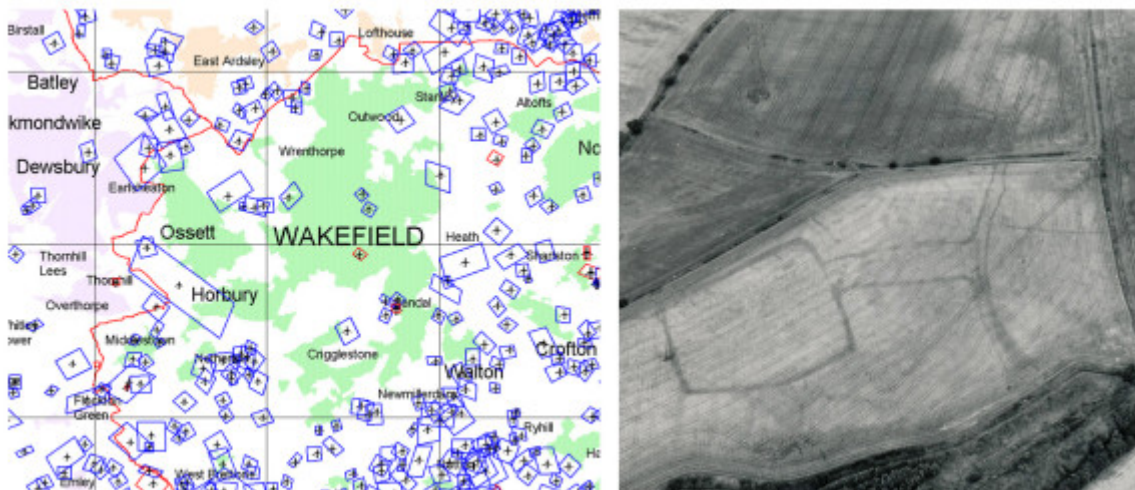
Recently, we have also had the benefit of a number of excellent volunteers and they have also massively helped towards enhancing the HER database.

Matt, a work placement student from the University of Bradford, has updated our records of prehistoric carved rocks using the results of a local heritage project conducted by Pennine Prospects. The project's archive has been deposited with the HER and includes detailed plans and photographs of many of the Bronze Age carved rocks that are so characteristic of West Yorkshire's moors and Pennine uplands.



Idol Stone carved rock, Ilkley Moor – copyright Pennine Prospects, 2013

In April we finally finished scanning and hot-linking our aerial photographic collection to our GIS. This collection consists of over 3,000 photographs, which were taken during the 1980s and 90s of cropmark and earthwork features within West Yorkshire. Due to the geology on the eastern side of West Yorkshire, vast remnants of an Iron Age/Romano-British cropmark landscape is still visible from the air. Scanning the aerial photographs has proved really useful in helping us map where elements of this early archaeological landscape still survive.



Left: detail showing coverage of scanned photographs.

Right: aerial photograph showing cropmarks of an Iron Age settlement enclosure near Pontefract

Currently we are just starting a new volunteer project scanning our collection of slides. This collection includes images of many of the region's historic buildings, as well as photos taken during historic

excavations.



Images from the HER slide collection – 1978 excavations of Castleford Roman bathhouse

So, what is the point of all this enhancement?! Well, it provides a public benefit helping us to answer the enquiries we get from local people interested in the heritage on their doorstep. Improved records also help the HER to be a useful research tool for archaeological societies and academics. Lastly, as in other areas of the country, the archaeology of West Yorkshire threatened by the need for more housing stock and other developments. Up-to-date and detailed HER records are crucial for helping our planning archaeologists collate the evidence they need to protect, or get the best possible recording of, the region's archaeology and historic buildings.

If you would like to explore the archaeology and built heritage of West Yorkshire in more detail, you can search a version of our database via [Heritage Gateway](#), visit our [website](#), or follow us on [Facebook](#).