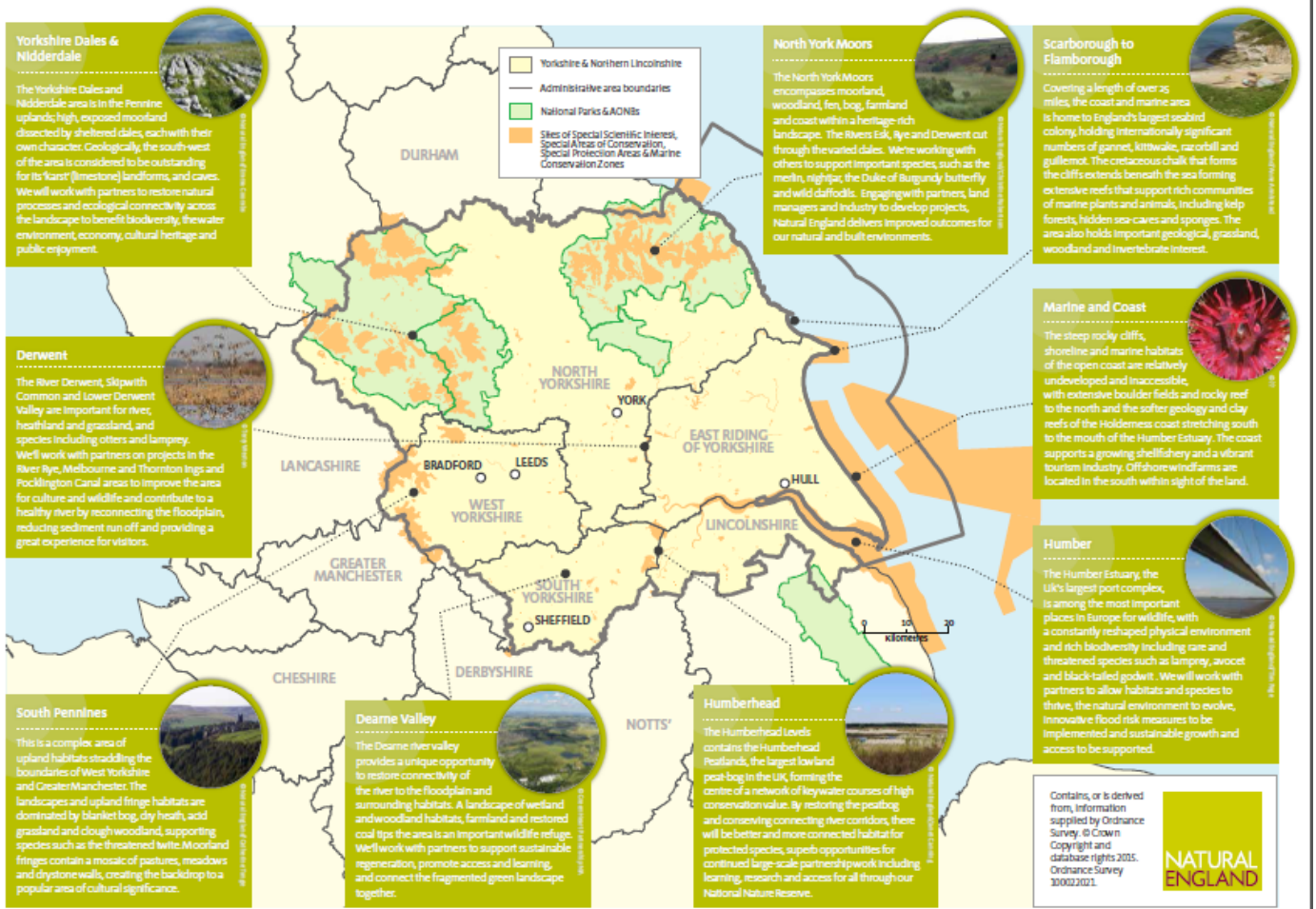


NATURAL ENGLAND DAY OF ARCHAEOLOGY 2016

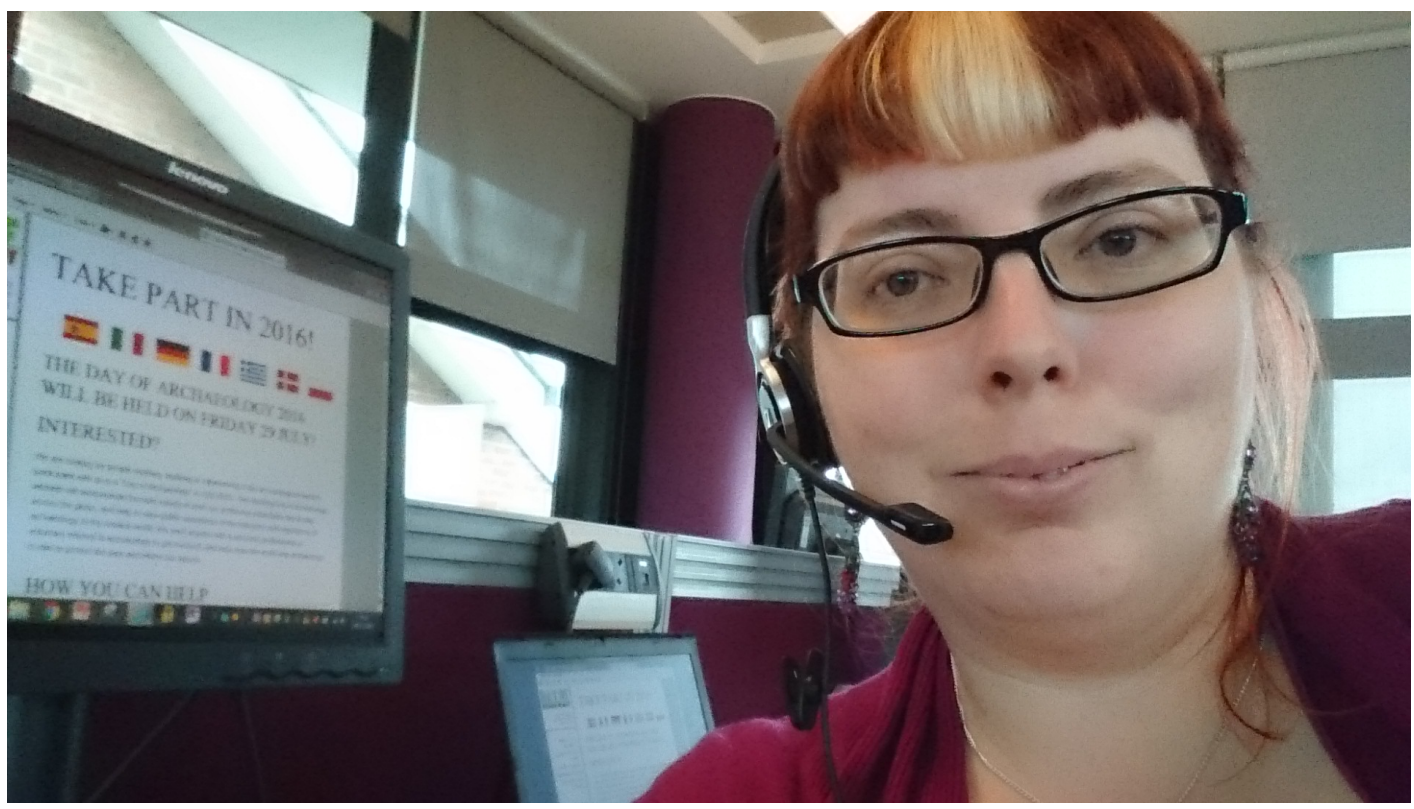
August 4, 2016 Kat Curation, Day of Archaeology, Day of Archaeology 2016, Explore Posts, Grants and Funding, Landscape Archaeology, UK agri-environment, Dearne Valley, historic environment, HLF, Natural England, Plumpton Rocks, rural archaeology

I am an historic environment lead adviser for Natural England. Natural England is an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs . We look after the natural environment including nature conservation (particularly SSSIs) and landscape – including cultural landscapes and the historic environment. We also work closely with the Environment Agency and Forestry Commission. I'm based in Yorkshire where I work with rural archaeological sites, traditional buildings and historic landscapes.

This year has been an interesting one for me as much of my work is involved with agri-environment schemes and this work has been affected by the Brexit vote. Some decisions have been delayed but we are all working hard to make up lost time and help our farmers with this year's grant applications which are due in for September. Natural England have also moved to a new delivery model where we have categorised our work into 'business as usual' and 'priority focus areas' – in these focus areas we will allocate added staff time to things like partnership working to achieve common objectives by working together with other organisations in the public and private sector. In Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire we have 9 focus areas and I work within 5 of these; Yorkshire Dales & Nidderdale, Humber, South Pennines, Dearne Valley, and Humberhead Levels while my colleague deals with archaeology in the other areas.



Today I am working from our head office in York (although I am usually based in Leeds with one day per week of home working and usually another out on various farms or nature reserves). I've got paperwork and email to catch up on as this has been a very busy week.



Some of this work relates to the Dearne Valley where there is a Heritage Lottery Funded Landscape Partnership. On Tuesday I went to a meeting at Elsecar Heritage Centre with the Dearne Valley Landscape Partnership and their new archaeological consultants. As part of Natural England's in-kind contribution to the project I helped to write the brief and assess tenders. This first meeting with the successful consultants, ArcHeritage, was to plan a series of events to involve the community within the Dearne Valley more closely with their heritage and inspire them to protect it. As the Dearne river valley has interesting mosaic habitats of wetland, woodland, farmland and restored coal tips it is an important wildlife refuge. It also has an amazing amount of archaeology, not just industrial – as you can see here in the [Dearne Valley Heritage Audit](#).

Due to its habitat interest Natural England staff work a lot with farmers here, showing them how to manage their land sustainably, while my contribution is to help them manage their archaeological sites. Today I'm checking the sites that the consultants thought would be suitable for access and outreach activities to see if there are any clashes with our grant schemes, or if there are sensitive species which might mean that we need to alter our plans. So far I haven't found any major clashes! I'm confident that we can work together as a team to make the project work for nature, for the historic environment and for the local people but I can see from my maps that there are a few things which might have to be tweaked. I've contributed to a real reduction to heritage at risk in Yorkshire along with the farmers who manage the land and it's something I really do feel proud about.

The other big event this week was the reopening of Plumpton Rocks parkland. This Grade II* parkland was placed on the heritage at risk register in 2012 then in 2013 it applied for an agri-environment scheme. Along with the owner, Historic England and the Country Houses Foundation, Natural England have helped to grant aid a restoration including lake desilting, planting of new wood pasture (the planting plan being taken from historic OS mapping) and tackling of invasive species such as rhododendron and Himalayan balsam. While Natural England restored the landscape our partners have focused on the structural elements including the dam. It has been one of the trickiest restoration projects of my life (I usually have 6 or 7 medium to large restoration projects per year to deal with but this is a big one!) as there are lots of designations both for the historic structures and for the natural environment, all of which needed to be taken into consideration before we made any changes. I have been on the project steering group for the last 3 years so it was a big privilege for me to attend the reopening after so long making things happen behind the scenes. It's very unusual for us to be greeted by Betty's fat rascals and a glass of (non-alcoholic!) bubbly – and it'll all have to be reported on the central gifts register to ensure that I'm not being inappropriately influenced – but the owner really wanted to show his appreciation despite the rainy weather!



The work there will help local people see the parkland in its former glory, and I was simply bursting with excitement to see how the press and local people would feel at the transformation. It was a little disappointing to have rain on such a special day although we braved the weather to walk around the lake and point out the transformation wrought by desilting, tree planting and felling and structural restoration. There are a few bits of restoration work still to complete but to see a neglected site transformed and teach owners how to care for their land long term is one of the best parts of my job. Today I'm writing up the experiences from this project so that other colleagues can learn from it as a case study and other sites will be able to benefit from my experiences. I'm also sending information about the press articles that are being written on the site to our communications officer and highlighting any tweets that we might want to retweet. Soon I will move on to another project but I do always feel a special connection to the places that I've been able to help.

Kat Hopwood-Lewis, BSc (Hons), MA, MCIfA

29/7/16