Meeting Summary

Project Overview and Purpose

- Representatives of the Hemley Project—project director Rosie and deputy director Archie—presented a year of archaeological research at High House Farm, near Hemley. The project is a partnership between Durham University Archaeology Society and landowner Patrick, who provided access to his land.
- The project was launched by the Durham University Archaeology Society in late 2025. Its central aim is to provide students and early-career archaeologists with practical experience across the full research process: desk-based assessment, fieldwork, geophysical survey, and post-excavation analysis. Participants have included students from Durham and Southampton and volunteers from UCL.
- The project was originally prompted by a Durham PhD student who knew Patrick but lacked time to undertake the work. Archie is studying maritime archaeology for an MSc at the University of Southampton; Rosie is project director and president of the Durham University Archaeology Society.
- The current funded year is nearing its end. The team hopes to secure further funding and continue, while recognizing that the project's duration depends on funding, volunteer availability, succession planning, and worthwhile research questions.

Archaeological Context and Existing Evidence

- The wider area has evidence spanning from the late Palaeolithic and later prehistoric periods through Roman, medieval, and post-medieval activity.
- Development-related work, including investigations connected with wind farms and the East Anglia One pipeline, identified later prehistoric activity such as field systems, pits, and ring gullies, indicative of settlement.
- A 1980s survey associated with John Neaman and the Sutton Hoo investigations recorded sparse late prehistoric flints and Roman, medieval, and post-medieval pottery around the farm.
- A 2003 intertidal survey along the River Deben recorded seawalls, post alignments, and possible bridge structures. It noted potential for additional remains in inland salt-marsh areas, although access limited recording there.
- Crop marks in the landscape may indicate enclosures, trackways, and ring ditches. One oval enclosure listed in the Suffolk Historic Environment Record has been interpreted as a possible Neolithic longhouse; the presenter thought it lay just north of Hemley Church. Another crop mark has been interpreted as a possible Roman enclosure.

Archival Research and Historic Land Use

- Before fieldwork, volunteers undertook desk-based assessment, including research in Suffolk archives and examination of 19th-century tithe maps and records.
- Field names preserve clues to former land use. Examples include "Saltfield," suggesting a saltworks, and "Tilefield," suggesting a tileworks; documentary evidence for these activities is otherwise limited.
- The tithe records, dating to about 1840, identify Sarah Raw as the owner of substantial land now associated with High House Farm. The team also found reference to John Raw but has not established his relationship to Sarah.
- The records identify Pearl Cross as occupying a cottage and surrounding farmland. The presenters noted that women appearing as landowners or occupiers in these records is notable, while emphasizing that the records alone do not establish exactly how the land was used or the individuals' circumstances.

- Rosie discussed the changing legal position of women's property rights in the 19th century. She described the 1840s as a period before later restrictions and recalled that a law in 1879 may have prevented married women from owning land in their own right, while noting uncertainty about the exact date.

Non-Invasive Shoreline Survey and Salt-Marsh Cores

- The team created a drone-based orthomosaic by collecting overlapping images and processing them into a top-down, to-scale image with corrected photographic distortion.
- The survey aimed to document shoreline features, including wooden posts and other remains noted during the 2003 intertidal survey but not fully recorded. Because tidal and coastal erosion can remove features rapidly—potentially within days or between one season and the next—repeat surveys are planned to monitor change.
- The team also collected salt-marsh cores as part of a paleoenvironmental study led by Josh Harley, a geography specialist now undertaking a PhD at York. The work focuses on foraminifera ("forams"), microscopic shelled organisms whose species vary with salinity, temperature, and tidal conditions. Identifying them in successive core samples can help reconstruct past environments.
- In this core, man-made sea defences and other disturbance have left only the upper portion of the salt-marsh peat suitably preserved. The potentially usable sequence appears to represent roughly 150 years, based on average salt-marsh deposition rates; erosion and backwash prevent reliable dating of deeper sediment. The team therefore cannot currently extend the reconstruction further back at this location.
- Taking cores elsewhere along the Deben might be possible, but would likely require greater funding and further planning.

Fieldwalking and Finds

- Volunteers systematically fieldwalked a 3.1-hectare field, using approximately 5-metre traverses to improve coverage. The same field had been surveyed in the 1980s using 20-metre traverses by one surveyor, so the new work offered denser coverage, although ground and plough conditions affect what can be found.
- Finds included a light, diffuse scatter of flint, tentatively dated to the Neolithic and early Bronze Age, especially in Area A near Kirton Creek. The assemblage includes flakes, a blade-like flake, a flint core, and a flake with a notch that might have been used to process cordage or fibres; that possible use has not been confirmed microscopically.
- Post-medieval tile and bottle glass were relatively common. Other tentative finds included possible Bellarmine or late medieval stoneware and a possible early medieval pottery sherd. These identifications remain provisional and require specialist assessment.
- Ceramics were relatively more frequent in Area C, though numbers overall were low. The team compared find locations with crop marks to test whether the mapped features had a corresponding surface scatter. No clear correlation emerged, but results depend on the timing of ploughing and field conditions.
- The fieldwalking provides evidence of prehistoric activity, but the team stressed that the evidence is sparse and conclusions remain tentative.

Test Pitting and Preservation

- In August, the team opened two initial test pits north of High House Farm near the creek and salt marsh. They abandoned them after discovering that the ground had been

mechanically disturbed and compressed, making the deposits unlikely to be in their original context.

- Two replacement test pits were opened farther south near a previously recorded possible Neolithic axe-head find spot. Excavation reached sandy, apparently sterile natural geology, but the small pits provided only a limited "keyhole" view of the landscape.
- Finds included a few struck and burnt flints, ceramic building material, occasional pottery, and modern glass and plastic. The flint was generally in good condition, which may indicate that an undisturbed deposit survived at some point in the recent past or may still survive in patches, despite extensive plough disturbance.
- Rosie emphasized the wider challenge of working on long-farmed land: near-surface archaeology is often disturbed, and remaining deposits may be ephemeral or deep. The project is testing whether student-led, small-scale research can generate useful information from farmland that might otherwise receive little archaeological attention.
- The team noted that Suffolk's Historic Environment Research Framework identifies research priorities, including how to investigate archaeological remains on farmland and work with farmers. Rosie recommended these county frameworks as useful, if lengthy, resources.

Geophysical Survey

- Matt described two methods used during the weekend's non-invasive survey:
- **Magnetometry/gradiometry:** Measures variations in the Earth's magnetic field associated with changes in the ground, often caused by human activity such as burning or deposited material. It is relatively rapid, passive, and useful for covering broad areas.
- **Conductivity survey:** Measures ground conductivity, which varies with moisture and salinity. It can help examine broader landscape and geoarchaeological patterns, though it is lower resolution than magnetometry.
- Two magnetometer carts were used: one with three sensors at half-metre separation and another with sensors at one-metre intervals. The main target is a potentially L-shaped enclosure visible in imagery, an unusual form compared with the more typical rectangular or square Roman boundary ditches. The team also hopes to identify features within the enclosure.
- Approximately 2 hectares were surveyed magnetically and about 4 hectares using conductivity. Some conductivity data were quickly gridded; the rest, including magnetometry, still needs processing and interpretation over the following months, possibly through the Christmas period.
- The plan for the next day was to complete magnetometry in Areas B and C and, if ground conditions allowed, attempt ground-penetrating radar over two angular linear features forming part of the possible L-shaped boundary. The team expected this to be difficult because of the field conditions.

Research Priorities, Community Value, and Dissemination

- The project is approaching the end of its current funded year. The team must complete its finances and submit an initial report in December, and is exploring another funding application.
- Planned or desired work includes repeating the drone survey to measure coastal erosion, completing post-excavation analysis, publishing results, and developing a research programme for a possible next year.

- The team intends to share reports with Suffolk County Council's archaeology team and add project results to the publicly accessible Historic Environment Record. Rosie also recommended Suffolk Heritage Explorer as a resource for finding records of local archaeology, crop marks, settlements, and investigations.
- The team aims to present findings at the Lithic Studies Society conference the following Saturday and had already presented at an early-career conference that summer. Rosie emphasized giving student contributors credit and opportunities to present their work.
- Project continuity requires training new volunteers and successors because student participants graduate and move on. The team plans to focus on succession and developing the next research proposal over the following month.
- The group acknowledged support from the Royal Archaeological Institute, which funded the year of research; Patrick, for access to his land; project volunteers; Matt and other specialists; and Durham University staff and professors.

Questions and Discussion

- **Why Hemley?** Rosie confirmed that the project arose through Patrick's connection with a Durham PhD student. The location was partly a matter of fortunate personal connections, as is common for small community archaeology projects. Despite the travel from Durham, the area offers substantial research potential.
- **How long might the project last?** The team could not give a fixed term. A community archaeology project might continue for years or decades, depending on funding, volunteers, and useful research questions. The team stressed that excavation is destructive: once an archaeological context is removed, it cannot be recovered, so intervention must be justified against the value of preserving material for future methods and researchers.
- **Neolithic settlement and mobility:** Archie described debate over whether Neolithic people were settled or highly mobile, including possible seasonal movement. Evidence in the region includes Neolithic and early Bronze Age activity beneath some Sutton Hoo barrows, roundhouses, pits identified through the East Anglia One project, and substantial farmsteads that may have lasted generations. The landscape was likely open and only partly cultivated, but actively managed; polished axes suggest woodworking and possible coppicing for building timber.
- **Salt-marsh remains, sea defences, and climate change:** A local attendee asked about traces of artificial alteration in the marsh and the potential to study them. Archie said the team is interested in medieval land reclamation and historic seawalls, which documentary sources indicate were built in strips of "Deverlands" at least from the Middle Ages. Rosie noted that the drone work is mapping probable sea defences and that a core through a known post-medieval seawall could help establish how it was built, but this would need to be future work. The salt marsh's role in coastal protection and sea-level-rise resilience makes the subject locally and academically relevant. Protected-environment restrictions limit intrusive work, so non-invasive survey is especially important.
- A village representative described local work using probes to identify underlying clay and investigate whether seawall locations followed clay deposits. The project agreed that contact would be useful, and Rosie encouraged collaboration with local history groups, whose knowledge can strengthen archaeological research.

- **Origin of the partnership:** Rosie explained that Patrick had previously been involved with a similar student project at St Andrews. A researcher who later moved to Durham for a PhD helped create the connection that led to the Hemley project.
- The audience was invited to follow up by email and through the project's social media. The meeting chair hoped to obtain a copy of the presentation and recording, and proposed taking the discussion to the local history group. Rosie welcomed stronger links between archaeologists and local groups; the chair also recommended speaking with Simon.

Action Items

- Process and interpret the magnetometry data and remaining conductivity data over the coming months, potentially during the Christmas period.
- Complete the planned magnetometry survey in Areas B and C and attempt ground-penetrating radar on the two linear features if conditions permit.
- Undertake post-excavation analysis and specialist assessment of provisional pottery and flint identifications.
- Complete project finances and submit the initial report in December; pursue options for further funding and prepare a research programme for a possible next year.
- Repeat the drone orthomosaic survey to monitor shoreline erosion, subject to future planning and funding.
- Publish and share project results, provide reports to Suffolk County Council's archaeology team, and add records to the Historic Environment Record.
- Train incoming volunteers and develop succession plans during the following month.
- Present project work at the Lithic Studies Society conference the following Saturday.
- Follow up with local residents and history groups about seawall research, underlying clay, and local knowledge; the chair specifically suggested contacting Simon.

Follow-Up and Key Dates

- **August:** Test-pitting work was undertaken.
- **Late 2025:** The Durham University Archaeology Society launched the project.
- **Following day after the talk:** Planned completion of magnetometry in Areas B and C, with a possible ground-penetrating-radar attempt.
- **Following Saturday:** Planned presentation at the Lithic Studies Society conference.
- **Over the following months / up to Christmas:** Geophysical data processing and interpretation.
- **December:** End-of-year finances and initial report due; current funded year concludes.
- **Following month:** Planned emphasis on volunteer succession and next-year research planning.
- **Future years, subject to funding and permissions:** Repeat drone survey, possible coring through a seawall or at other Deben locations, and further investigation of medieval land reclamation and salt-marsh history.
- **Project contact:** Hemleyproject@duarchaeologysociety.org. The team also has social media channels; the chair planned to seek a copy of the presentation and recording and take the material to the local history group.