

Regular readers of the CCDT website may have read in the autumn of 2017 (under the 'Friends of Barry Buddon' section) a report covering the initial exploratory excavation of the First World War training trench system at Barry Buddon. This was conducted under a ground breaking programme known as Operation Nightingale established by the Defence Infrastructure Organisation and others to provide educational services to sick, injured and wounded service personnel and veterans returned from Afghanistan. The focus was subsequently moved to helping veterans develop new skills and get involved in archaeological investigations. This uses the expertise of Wessex Archaeology and Breaking Ground Heritage, a Community Interest Company (created by veterans) working with universities using heritage as a pathway.



A return visit to the trenches led by the same organisations took place in August 2018 and was facilitated by the MOD's Training Safety Officer at Barry Buddon. This second visit was designed to investigate the chronology and development of the trench complex while also giving two groups of veterans the opportunity to develop their archaeological skills. With the vast majority of the veterans having never been on an archaeological site before, the Wessex Archaeology site team guided them through opening up excavation areas, GPS and Total Station surveys and the recording of the trenches through the drawn and written record. A selection of four trenches were identified for excavation, one of which was considerably wider and with longer fire bays than the standard British trenches used at the time. This suggested it may have been a recreation of the German Hindenburg Line created in September 1916. The trench contained no sandbags or other revetting structures which were found in the other trenches examined. Buried in the earth at the base of the trench however were two concentrations of rusted food tins, the shapes of which suggested they formerly contained sardines, bully beef and soup, standard fare in British Army Ration Packs even now!



A concentration of 19th-century bullets from Snider, Martini-Henry and Enfield rifles were found within the redeposited material on the sides of the trench, suggesting that the area contained targets and butts for training predating the construction of the trench complex. These may have been fired from a series of slit trenches discovered along the ridgeline to the south, as this was a typical defensive set up in conflicts such as the Boer War.



As can be seen from the photograph above the other trenches examined contained the 'tiger stripe' remains of sandbags along their edges, revetting the trench sides and holding back the redeposited material dug "out to form the parapet and paradose of the trenches. Elements of the timber revetting stakes for these sandbags were still present, as were heavily decayed duckboards within the base of the frontline trench. In the backfill of the trenches there was a concentration of barbed wire, some clearly still in the rolls which it had been in along the top of the trench before it was buried . The highlight of the finds was the complete head of a British Army trenching shovel, found below the barbed wire in the base of the trench. One hundred years on and we are still using the same tools!!



The two other trenches targeted lay outwith the earthwork system, which appeared to be part of the wider complex of battlefield features, with one trench targeting one of a series of small round pits and the other targeting a linear trench around 50 m long. The small round pit proved to be a possible foxhole, although it contained no dating material beyond 1970s blank cartridges. The linear trench proved to be a full depth fire trench, minus the crenelations. The presence of two shallower trenches to the west, one at 30 yards and one at 60 suggests that this may have been used as a pistol and rifle range, with the shallower trenches being the butts containing the targets. Central to the archaeologists' understanding of the earthworks was walking around the wider complex with the veterans, using the latter's knowledge of battlefields, conflict and military training to identify features less obvious in function than the trenches themselves. These included a possible mine crater, with a sap leading to it, the series of possible slit trenches along the ridgeline to the south (mentioned above) and a series of potential dugouts of different designs along the southern trench line. All of these suggested that the complex contained an example of every feature the soldiers might encounter on the Western Front, allowing their trainers to familiarise the troops before they were sent across the Channel. As a finale to the excavation and before the trenches were back filled, the organisers kindly invited 13 history students from Carnoustie High School to visit the site, have the various trenches systems explained to them and be briefed on the dig and its findings.



This was very well received and particularly appreciated by the Head Teacher who wrote:

“Both Junior and senior pupils commented on three aspects of their visit. Firstly the scale and complexity of the training trench system was a real surprise and gave the pupils real pause for

thought about exactly what troops faced when they got to the front. The finds themselves were also commented on, the traces of sandbags seemed to have made a particular impression and of course the amount of spent ammunition reinforced what the training facility was designed to do. The fact that there are structures on site that are of unknown use was a big surprise to our pupils who had expected the archaeologists to have a ready explanation for everything- this was such a useful insight into the nature of archaeology and how knowledge and understanding can be lost in a relatively short period of time. From a teaching perspective, the deeper knowledge of how Buddon's use as a training facility will be integrated into teaching materials for future year groups in both History and Geography."

Dickie Bennet, Breaking Ground Heritages Project Director, on reading this response, replied :- "That is amazing and really shows the value of interacting with the local community so that they can take charge of their own heritage." A sentiment which all who have an interest in Carnoustie and it's heritage which readily agree with!

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