

Field Journal; Llanllyr

For the last module of our first year at University, 'Into The Field' required us all to gain firsthand experience on a working site overseen by our lecturers and mentors to begin the journey of becoming archaeologists, should that be the career path we take. As such, the site chosen for us was Llanllyr, a farm at the edge of Talsarn, and connected to Aberaeron via the Aeron Valley. This site has been worked with permission of the farmer, Matthew, over the past 10 to 15 years - though an exact estimate from any lecturer asked ended up around the 12 to 13 year(s) mark. The period we were given for the excavation was 10 days, all from 9am to 4pm.

Day 1

On the first day, we were introduced to Martin Bates, as the lead of our excavation he determined what it was each group would attempt to look for; flint.

Flint is useful as a find for archaeology because it is undeniable evidence for human activity in the area - we were informed that this area has revealed flint before, with our group (Soli-Anne Green, Leon Griffiths and Garreth Jenkins) being assigned the demonstrative trench made first, used to determine the size we would have for all the trenches, two metres by six metres. We created the borders with line measure wire, and four six-inch nails in each corner the wire would wrap around.

The initial energy and motivation between the four of us was high from excitement and anticipation, and being assigned the very first trench allowed us to get to work before everyone else - at the time, it felt like a reward: the tent with the equipment in didn't have any line measure at all, and I just so happened to have some with me, just enough to line all of the trenches. Being able to help the excavation was a nice feeling, so being able to get started after doing so made things even better.



Fig. 1. Soli-Anne Green, *Digging In*, 2026

We began by spreading a tarp out to the left of our trench (when facing it from the tent) and then used spades to dig around the inside border of the trench, before digging out squares to line the far sides of the tarp to create three walls - this carried on from the entirety of the first day to the second, where after about an hour we finished up building the walls and facing the blocks grass-to-grass, or dirt-dirt to protect the turf and help it grow back after backfilling.

It was here that we had hit clay. Originally, we believed it was only at the corner of the fourth nail (closest to our 0, 0 nail) with the spade having difficulty digging into the ground. The mattocking later revealed that the entirety of our working area was made up of dense clay, and made the rest of the digging highly taxing.



Fig. 2. Soli-Anne Green, *The Last Piece*, 2026

Day 2

Whilst day two had begun with continuing to remove the last dregs of turf, finishing this allowed us to move to the next step; mattocking.



Fig. 3. Soli-Anne Green, *Mattocking*, 2026

We were introduced to the mattock, a heavy, almost leg-length tool used to help level and even the surface. Quentin gave us advice on how to use it properly, by holding it with both hands and allowing the weight of the tool to drop into the ground, dragging towards the user to waste less energy and improve efficiency.

After the first day, Soli, Leon and myself were all having issues with our backs from lifting the heavy blocks of turf to the tarp wall, alongside carrying the weight. Garreth, however, was already used to this through his experience in archaeology and gave us knowledge and methods to improve our efficiency further. The issue with mattocking was that we needed to collect the loose scraped up from its usage and move to the tarp, requiring more strength.

The mattocking was fully completed by the end of day two, making incredible time, leading to the next step; trowelling.



Fig. 4. Soli-Anne Green, *Mik, Trowelling*, 2026

Day 3 & 4

Trowelling, whilst not being the most physically challenging task, definitely was one by the time we were all on our knees in the trench, and scraping back small sections of the clay until reaching a layer of yellow-white clay underneath the gray above it.

Martin and his wife, Sam, are both archaeologists that have a high level of knowledge when it comes to flint. Sam came in to present to us with previous findings of flint and other objects, like a polished stone handaxe that was found.

The presentation given by Sam was the most helpful overall, and gave us a presentation of what the flint would look like, as my previous assumption (as we hadn't found anything significant) was that they were gray/black in colour, based upon the knowledge that obsidian is, and is black - flint can be a multitude of coloured variations based upon impurities, and mineral content found within can cause it to be unusual colours like pink, blue, green, or brown, gray and black.

It was also the section where we learned the most methods of surveying, creating plans and using equipment to do so. We learned how to use a dumpy level and map out the trench's nails and approximate height above sea level, as well as the markings for trench outline, plan edge and approximations.



Fig. 5. Soli-Anne Green, *Drawing the Plan*, 2026

The most we had found was chunks of charcoal, quartz, slate and stones - nothing big enough to go in the finds tray which dimmed motivations, alongside that Garreth was asked to go to another trench to help dig there, leaving the work to be done by us three. The only

'big find' we had was discovering plough lines, which Martin believed were from World War II, and Quentin from the Late Medieval period.



Fig. 6. Soli-Anne Green, *Plough Marks*, 2026

We also had a tour of the fields surrounding ours, being taught about what you can tell from the landscape of its terrain hundreds upon thousands of years ago.

Day 5

The all of our work now was trowelling, scooping up loose into a bucket and sieving it out to look for flint - day five brought us our introduction to context sheets.



Fig. 7. Soli-Anne Green, *Progress*, 2026

We learned that the composition of soil is based upon sand, silt and clay, and the methods of seeing what type of soil you have; if it sticks together and you can make a sausage shape into a donut, you have clay. If it's mainly silt, it will leave a stain on your hand, and sand is highly grainy. This test revealed that our trench was sandy and silty, but mostly clay. Inclusions are extras found in the soil, like our growing collection of charcoal.

Day 6

Day six brought us over to the trench Chris (or as we called him before knowing his name, King Theoden) was working on, digging over where our lecturers had come in the last ~13 years and did five 1m x 1m test pits, finding lumber and now trying to uncover what was only slightly revealed back then. Garreth was working on another trench with Steve, an old

student of our lecturers who informed us of their old nicknames back when he was in university. They were a bit off from Chris, and seemingly the semicircular shaped dips in their trenches almost seemed to line up. Quentin, Ros and Martin used it as an opportunity to present the definitions of contexts in the trench walls, explaining section drawings and context sheets.



Fig. 8. Soli-Anne Green, *Hard Work*, 2026

Day 7 - 10

Days seven to ten were the same - trowelling, collecting loose, sieving and repeat. We continued to find nothing, unlike all the other trenches which was highly disappointing, but still very useful for Martin and his knowledge for future reference: an empty trench in a place where he thought we would have the best chance of finding flint tells him about our area and the assumptions it clears away. The most unique thing was a piece of coal.



Fig. 9. Soli-Anne Green, *Coal and Leon*, 2026

Day ten was entirely made up of backfilling after a last effort to find flint, which unfortunately didn't work out for us. We managed to do it quickly so that we were able to leave the site early.



Fig. 10. Soli-Anne Green, *Sieving*, 2026

Our experience with the excavation, while disappointing to have found nothing, was amazing - each ache felt worth it due to the practicality, and was something I was wanting the most after two years of doing assignments without it, and we learned so much from our amazing

lecturers that will surely come in very handy as we continue our careers! (Thank you Quentin!)

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