

# Irchester Field School

## Teacher Information Pack

2026





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# WELCOME TO ARCHAEOLOGY

**The Chester House Estate (CHE)** is a unique heritage site in Northamptonshire. The Estate lies at the heart of one of the best preserved walled Roman small towns in Britain. As well as being the site of a Roman small walled town (known as Irchester), there is evidence for 10,000 years of human activity in the landscape, including a complex of traditional farm buildings dating back to the 17th century. At present, much of this heritage is buried; the challenge is to bring it to life and tell its stories.

The **Archaeological Resource Centre (ARC)** is a state-of-the-art facility (located within the Chester House Estate) which is the new archaeological archive repository for the whole of Northants. The ARC is currently bringing all collections to the new facility and will ultimately hold more than 20,000 boxes of finds from across Northamptonshire. The stretch of the Nene Valley forming the focus of this project is one of the richest parts of the country for archaeological investigation and archives.

## THE EXCAVATION

In June and July 2026 archaeologists from the **University of Leicester** will be excavating within the walls of the Roman town, in partnership with volunteers and staff from **CHE** and the **ARC**. Our partnership places research, learning and community engagement at its core. Past and present survey and excavation has focused not only the core of the walled town with its houses, workshops and temples, but its suburbs and cemeteries, allowing us to better understand the lives of its inhabitants. This research is revealing the hidden histories of communities living along this stretch of the Nene Valley, with a focus on the Late Iron Age and Roman periods.

Excavation is only one aspect of archaeological research, which draws on a vast and diverse range of evidence and sources, including ancient texts, historical records and archives, the remains of buildings, artefacts and ecofacts (natural materials used by people). Archaeologists investigate topics of the utmost importance today, such as conflict, social inequality, migration, diet, disease, and human creativity, ingenuity and resilience. This programme is a unique opportunity for your pupils to engage with highly experienced archaeological researchers and CHE staff and volunteers passionate about making archaeological research accessible, providing an exceptional range and depth of knowledge and expertise. Together we are working to provide life-enhancing opportunities focused on archaeology and heritage for young people and the wider community.



Credit: One to One Development Trust



# YOUR WORKSHOPS

## TOOTHY TALES FROM THE PAST

This 1-hour workshop will take place in the marquee and will be led by leading osteoarchaeologists as part of the University of Leicester's Tobacco, Health and History project.

This session will include an interactive talk on the impacts of tobacco on human health in the past, particularly oral health. It will include the following:

- A short introduction to the research project, its aims, and what it has found. This will focus on the importance of osteological evidence for indicating the health impacts of tobacco use through time.
- 'Archaeology detectives' activity. Students will piece together (replica) human jaws to work out who they might belong to based on the condition of their teeth.

It will conclude with an opportunity for students to look at and discuss the jaws of real archaeological skeletons (from which the replicas were created).



### Parental permission

**Please use the parental permission letter to gather consent for students to view real human skeletal remains for this activity.**

You can find our example letter for Parent/Guardians and the template consent forms for viewing Human remains in the email where the pack was shared.

## FROM FINDS TO FACTS (POST-EXCAVATION)

When arriving at the ARC, groups that are larger than 15 will be split into two smaller groups. Each activity will run for up to half an hour (including moving time) allowing for each group to take part in both activities.

**Please ensure you bring enough adults to adequately supervise this.** We strongly recommend having 4 adults for visiting the ARC to allow for two to supervise each activity.

### LAB WORKSHOP - UNDER THE LENS

Students will complete lab activities in our research room. Students will:

- Use microscopes to examine and compare the environmental archaeology (seeds, small animal bones, charcoal)
- Have a go at identifying and explaining what they can see.

### ARCHIVE EXPERIENCE - ARTEFACT DETECTIVES

Students will take part in an archiving activity in the ARC (Bulk Store), connecting archaeological finds with different areas of activity within the Roman town of Irchester.

Students will:

- Learn why it is important for archaeologists to record the location of the artefacts they find
- Handle real artefacts and have a go at interpreting them
- Draw conclusions about the the lives of people living in Roman Irchester from the artefacts and their context



# YOUR WORKSHOPS

## MUD, FINDS AND ROMANS

### EXCAVATION TOUR, EQUIPMENT EXPLORATION AND FEATURE RECORDING

This session takes place in the excavation area and aims to provide an understanding of Iron Age and Roman life.

Students will:

- tour a live excavation
- talk to professional archaeologists
- handle finds and learn about archaeological excavation techniques
- have a go at washing finds

### FINDS WASHING

At the finds washing station, your students will wash artefacts from previous excavations, ensuring that the artefacts are ready to be examined by an archaeologist.

Students will be guided through the finds washing process and challenged to:

- Identify any distinctive features
- Identify what the artefact is or its material
- Consider the different properties of materials and identify which types of materials are most commonly found and why

**This activity has a higher level of hands-on experience and will require teachers and supporting adults to assist with monitoring students and ensuring that all learners follow the processes outlined by the archaeologist.**

## CAREERS TALK

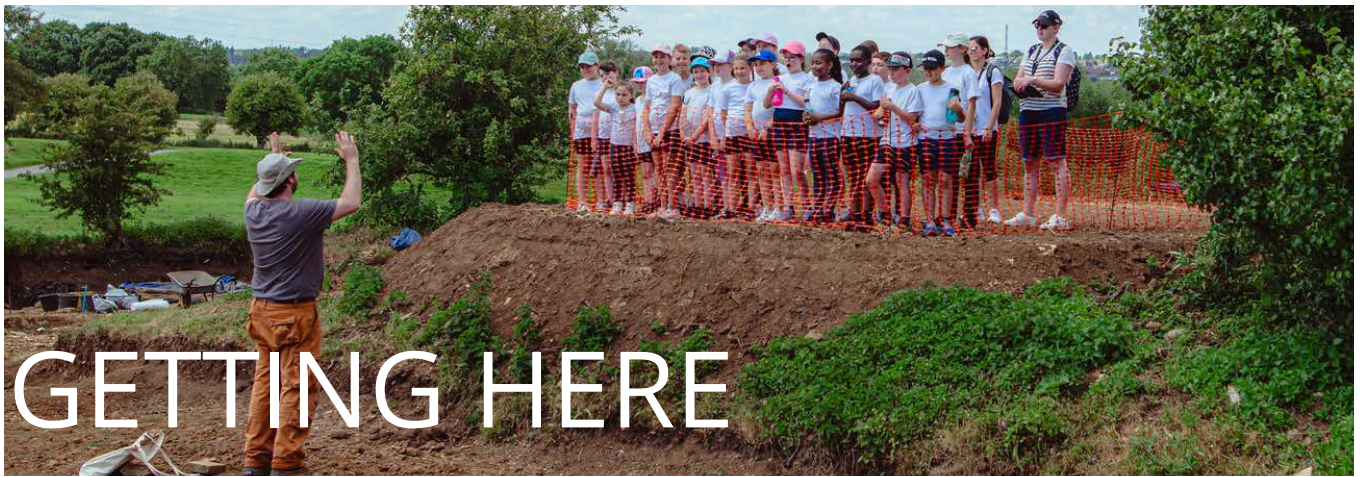
A 15-20 minute informal talk about careers in archaeology, studying archaeology post A-levels/6<sup>th</sup> form and university in general. This talk is followed by the opportunity for students to ask questions

**If you would like opt for this, you will need to let us know via our pre-visit form**



# Practical Programme Information

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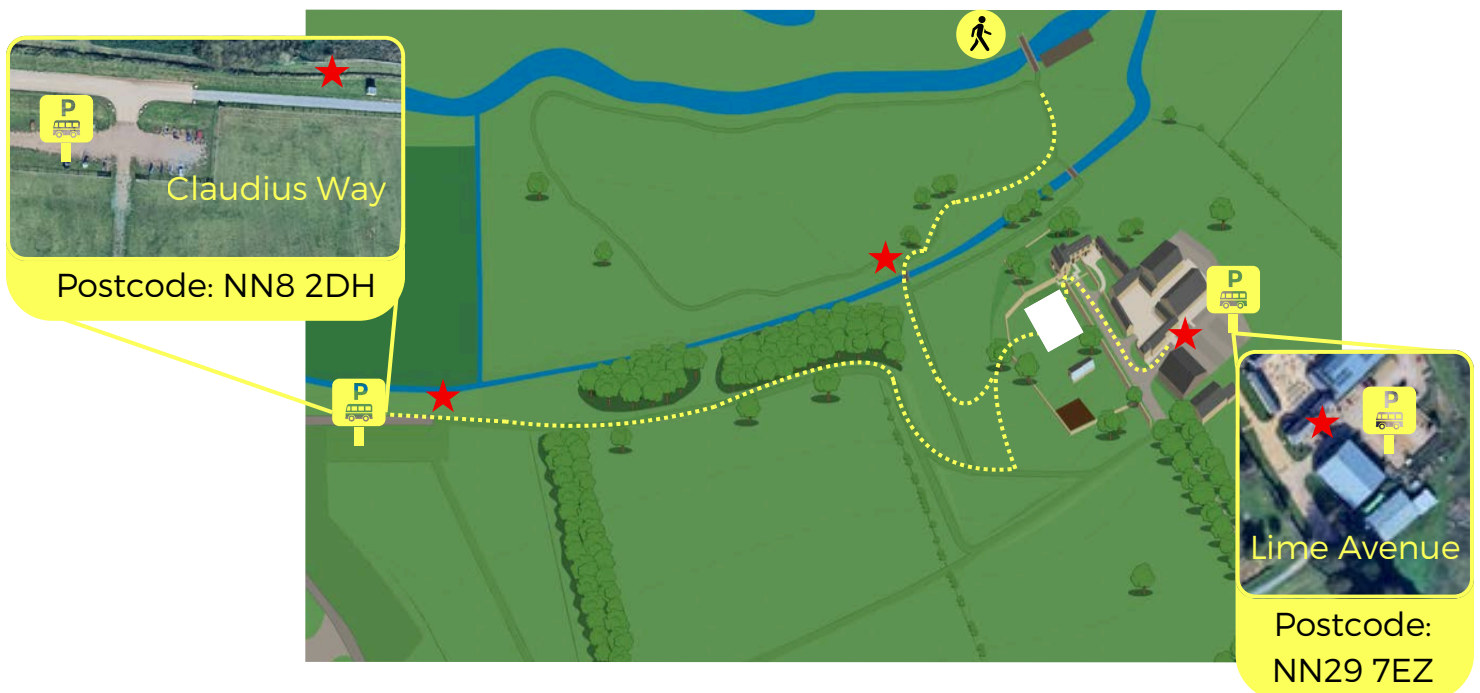
The Chester House Estate is located just off the eastbound A45 between Wellingborough and Rushden.

**Unless otherwise agreed in advance**, all coaches must use our Claudius Way car park to drop off and pick up students (Postcode: NN8 2DH) which can be accessed through the Prologis Park Wellingborough.

This car park is a 10-minute walk to the main building complex (where the closest toilets are located). There is a hard-standing footpath in place, which is wheelchair accessible.

## ARRIVAL TIMES

Please aim to arrive by 9.30am. The programme will start promptly at 10am. Late arrival may result in a reduced experience for your first activity.



## ACCESS REQUIREMENTS

Schools can (by prearrangement only) use our accessible Lime Avenue Car Park for students with access requirements. A staff member should be at Lime Avenue to register students.

## WALKING

Schools can walk to us from the Wellingborough Embankment, utilising the Greenway footpath which passes our footbridge.

## ON ARRIVAL

Please disembark your students and assemble at the nearest meeting point (marked with a ★) where one of our team will be waiting and ready to escort you to the marquee.

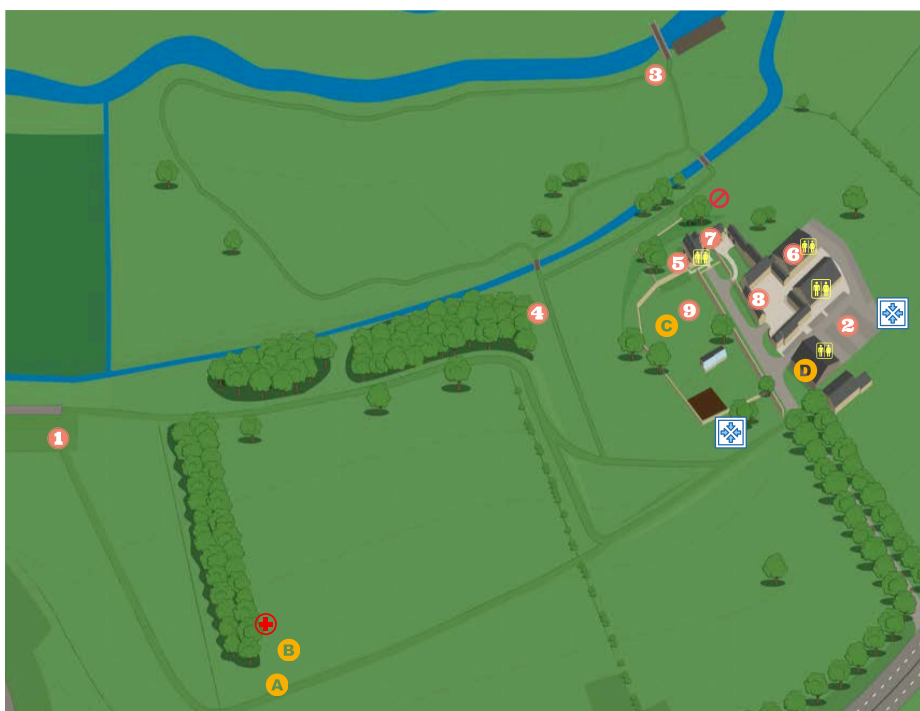
## PROBLEMS

If you have any problems on the day (e.g. the coach is running late) please call 07770 811707. We will not be able to change your itinerary.



## KEY AREAS OF THE SITE

Areas 1 - 9 are key facilities around the site, whilst Areas A - D are the locations of your facilitated workshops. Please note: The Chester House Estate is open to the public, who will have access to areas 1 - 8. Area 9, the marquee school space, will be used exclusively by school groups during your trip. Learning Room 1 will be available for students who need a quiet space or a break from the day. This room is located in the same building as the museum. If you need to use this space, please let staff know.



### Key.

- 1 Claudius way Car park
- 2 Lime Avenue Car park (Accessible access only)
- 3 Bridge Access from Wellingborough
- 4 Internal Bridge access
- 5 Play area
- 6 Learning centre and Museum
- 7 Farmhouse (Café) - Closed on Mondays
- 8 Haybarn - Snack vendor
- 9 Marquee School Space
- A Excavation
- B Finds Washing
- C Osteology workshop (in Marquee)
- D Archaeological Resource Centre
- + First aid point (by finds washing area)
- Fire Assembly Points
- Toilets

## MARQUEE SPACE

Each class will have allocated tables where they can leave their bags and have their lunch.

## PLAY AREA

Our play area is located outside our Farmhouse Cafe. Your students are welcome to use the play area during the breaks. **A member of your staff must be in the play area supervising your students at all times.**

## LIFTS

There are lifts in both the ARC and our museum. Please let us know as soon as possible if your group have any access requirements

## THE FARMHOUSE

The Farmhouse is open Tuesdays - Fridays and offers a variety food and drink. Please note we are a cashless site.

## TOILETS

There are toilet facilities located around the site. If you plan to take a larger group of students to the toilet we recommend using those located in the museum (building 6 on the map)

## FIRST AID

Our designated first aid point is the finds washing gazebo in the exhibition - Location B on the map.



## FOR TEACHERS

We recommend that teachers bring the following:

- A printed list of children with/without photo permission
- A way of making the children without photo permission identifiable
- A printed list of children with/without skeletal consent
- A printed list of students with SEND needs
- Printed copies of our '**Key Visit information for supervising adults**' - You should provide one per adult
- Camera
- First aid kit/medications
- The on-the-day mobile phone that corresponds to the phone number provided on booking.
- Suncream (weather dependent)

## RESOURCES WE WILL PROVIDE

- Black bin liners so you can take your rubbish with you at the end of the day.
- All workshop materials including pencils
- SEND adapted worksheets (if notice has been given)

## FOR STUDENTS

We recommend that students bring/wear the following:

- Outdoor footwear (no high heels, open-toe sandals, flipflops, Crocs etc)
- Weather-appropriate clothing (shorts and hats or waterproofs depending on the forecast) - **The excavation activity will go ahead outside regardless of the weather.**
- A large refillable water bottle
- Lunch

## BEST LEFT AT HOME

- Large bags - students will not be able to take these with them throughout the day, particularly during visits to the ARC and on the excavation
- Outdoor play equipment, including footballs.
- Phones - we do not permit the use of phones during workshops
- Cash - We are a cashless site. We will require card payment for any on-site purchases (e.g. ice cream/coffee).
- Valuables - the marquee where bags are being left will be unlocked all day. Anything left in the marquee is left at the owners own risk.