

Vertebrae? We've got your back!

Students on our MSc in Human Osteoarchaeology spend a lot of time looking at bones, funnily enough. But recently, they got the chance to make them... in felt. Why? We're glad you asked!

Felting is an ancient technique which, traditionally, created a textile by matting together wool using only heat, moisture and agitation. Examples of clothing, rugs and decoration have been found in graves, famously in Scythian Iron Age tombs in the Pazyryk Valley and Ukok plateau in the Altai Mountains of Siberia. Most recently, though, its creation has become a popular craft – sometimes called 'fibre art' – using felting needles, a mat and wool.

"I first encountered anatomy felting through 'I've got yer back', a community collaborative art/science project led by Janet Philp (Head of Administration in the Deanery of Biomedical Sciences) and artist Joan Smith." said Dr Linda Fibiger, Programme Co-Director MSc in Human Osteoarchaeology. "I created a C2 vertebrae, right at the top of the spine."

"Joan has, for a number of years, been doing a drawing session with my students, and I thought the felting with Janet would be another, art/craft-science crossover way to approach anatomy, to emphasise to students of Human Osteoarchaeology how important it is to really look at and feel the bone to understand form and function."

Students selected a plastic cast vertebrae from different areas of the spine as a model. Feedback on the session was

very positive, with students commenting that the process really made them look at the structure and different features of the bone casts.

Felting bones, from start to finish



Students working on felting vertebrae.



A vertebrae takes shape.



A felt vertebrae with its model.



Finished felt vertebrae.

Find out more:

- “I’ve got yer back”: A community art and anatomy project
- Article on the “I’ve got your back” project
- MSc Human Osteoarchaeology
- Dr Linda Fibiger’s staff profile

Archaeology Fieldtrip around

East Lothian

Dr Henry (Indiana) Jones Jr once said, "If you wanna be a good archaeologist you gotta get out of the library!", which is exactly what some of our first year archaeology students did recently.

The School of History, Classics and Archaeology is lucky enough to have a wealth of archaeological sites on its doorstep. A group of first year archaeology students led by Dr Guillaume Robin (Archaeology Teaching Director) and Dr Tanja Romankiewicz (Lecturer in Prehistoric and Roman Archaeology) recently toured East Lothian, taking in a range of sites covering thousands of years.

The group first visited Chesters Hill Fort, an Iron Age hill fort, probably built in the first millennium BC, and which was occupied into the Roman occupation of Britain in the early centuries of the first millennium AD. The site has never been excavated but the remains of several houses are still visible.



Professor Ian Ralston (baseball cap at left) describes Doon Hill, to students

Next on the itinerary was Doon Hill, an Early Neolithic settlement site (c. 3700 BC). In the 1960s the site was excavated but was thought to be Early Medieval! Further research and new radiocarbon dating have recently demonstrated

its Neolithic date. A special guest joined the group at Doon Hill, Professor Ian Ralston (Abercromby Emeritus Professor of Archaeology). Professor Ralston – an expert in hillforts – has a history with Doon Hill, having first excavated there a schoolboy and returned to it following his retirement, being instrumental in uncovering the evidence of the true date of the site.



Archaeologists assemble!

And last, but definitely not least, was a trip to Tantallon Castle, a grand Medieval castle built on a sea cliff edge. Built in the mid-14th century, it was besieged several times over the centuries, finally by Oliver's Cromwell's invasion of Scotland in 1651. It's a popular filming location, featuring in everything from sci-fi movie 'Under the Skin', starring Scarlett Johansson, to 'Kuch Kuch Hota Hai', a Bollywood romantic comedy.

You can find out more about our archaeology degrees, Drs Robin and Romankiewicz, as well as Professor Ralston's work at the links below.

- Undergraduate Archaeology degrees at the University of Edinburgh
 - Dr Guillaume Robin's staff profile
 - Dr Tanja Romankiewicz's staff profile
 - Professor Ian Ralston's staff profile
 - Site visited – Historic Environment Scotland
 - Atlas of Hillforts of Britain and Ireland – Ian Ralston
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What is burnout and what does it feel like?

In this blog post, Tessa Warinner, wellbeing adviser at the School of History, Classics, and Archaeology, discusses 'Burnout' – a rising concern in academia. Tessa discusses what it feels like, its prevalence, impact, and signposts helpful resources for managing it. This post belongs to the **Hot Topic theme: Critical insights into contemporary issues in Higher Education.**

I'm sure you've come across the term 'burnout' while scrolling through your social media and news feeds. I've personally noticed an increase in public conversation about it since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. Like many psychological terms, the actual meaning of it can get lost in the chatter. The World Health Organisation (WHO) characterises burnout as 'an occupational phenomenon'. They define it as

"a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed."

They said that the three main dimensions are as follows:

- feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion
- increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job
- reduced professional efficacy.

In my experience as a wellbeing adviser, I've frequently had both students and staff tell me they're feeling burnt out. They usually tell me about experiencing symptoms that closely resemble the Maslach Burnout Inventory, which is the go-to questionnaire for measuring if a person is experiencing this phenomenon. Some of the symptoms are:

- **Exhaustion:** feeling emotionally drained, frequently frustrated with your work, feeling at the end of your rope, and feeling like it's too much effort to directly interact with people at work.
- **Depersonalisation (or a loss of empathy for others):** feeling afraid that your job has made you more callous towards others, you are out of patience by the end of the work day, and you feel like you are too tired to get up to face another day at work.
- **Personal achievement:** feeling like you haven't accomplished anything worthwhile, you don't feel you're positively influencing others, and you struggle to create a relaxed work environment for yourself and others.

If any of these resonate with your personal experience, you are far from alone. Mental Health UK released a 2024 report about the YouGov poll they ran about burnout. They found that 91% of workers reported feeling extremely stressed out in the past year. One in five workers reported needing to take time off work for burnout symptoms in the past year. It's safe to say that at least one person in your inner circle has felt burned out at some point in their lives. I guess that means you're in good company, right?

Can students experience burnout?

The current definitions of burnout are worded for people working in jobs. In my experience, I have found that students frequently report burnout symptoms while completing their degree. Going to lectures, working on assessments, and attending exams can involve as much energy as someone working a full-time job. Coupled with the rigorous academic expectations that come with attending the University of Edinburgh, it's natural to feel worn down by it. Academic burnout appears to be under-studied, but a 2023 study found that out of the 22,983 students they included in the sample, over half of them were currently experiencing it. They also found that certain factors such as being male, having higher marks than the class average, and smoking cigarettes led to higher levels of academic burnout.

This study highlights the importance of understanding how burnout does not occur in a vacuum. I tell students (and my co-workers) that it is a very stressful time to work and study. We're collectively doing our best to cope with trying to see our friends and family, exercise, do chores, drink enough water, get eight hours of sleep, keep our screen times low, not get Covid-19, manage our money while we deal with the cost-of-living crisis, and watch our government deal with global geopolitical instability. In my professional opinion, experiencing at least some burnout symptoms is a normal response to these abnormal circumstances.

What can be done if you feel burnt out?

If anything from this post resonates with your experience, it's worth taking this burnout quiz by HealthCentral. This is not a diagnostic tool, but it can help you organise your thoughts around how you're feeling. It can help structure further conversations with medical and mental health professionals. There is also a great book called *Burnout: Solve Your Stress Cycle* by Emily and Amelia Nagoski, which does a deep dive into the phenomenon and has practical tips to help you feel better.

If you are a current University of Edinburgh student and don't know where to start addressing burnout, it's worth referring into Student Wellbeing Services using our referral form. A wellbeing adviser can meet with you to discuss your situation and come up with a bespoke support plan for you. Personally, I usually recommend taking time to rest and getting clinical help to help alleviate burnout. I would put them in touch with their student adviser to discuss the logistics around taking a leave of absence or an authorised interruption of studies, if this is what the student would like. I'm very mindful that students are typically reluctant to take any significant time off as they would like to graduate within four years, so I would usually find ways to build in more time for rest in their busy schedules. I would also help them find ways they can access therapy to talk more about their feelings. This can be through the University Student Counselling Service or external services located around the city.

If you are a staff member, time and clinical help are also the way to go. I would recommend speaking with your line manager first to discuss your current workload and obligations. There is also the University Occupational Health Service if you don't feel comfortable speaking with them. They will be able to point you in the direction of appropriate services.

All in all, burnout is a very common phenomenon that at least one person in your inner circle has experienced. Having it is no reflection on your character, or your ability to withstand stressful circumstances. No matter what, you're going to get through it. You're going to be okay.



Tessa Warinner

Tessa Warinner is a wellbeing adviser aligned with the University of Edinburgh's School of History, Classics, and Archaeology.

Unveiling innovation in Online Learning: The HCA TEL Learn Ultra Showcase

In this post, Rose Day, Learning Technologist at the School of History, Classics, and Archaeology (HCA), highlights the HCA TEL Learn Ultra Showcase. The showcase features some of the innovative courses and provides insightful commentary from course organizers and learning technologists who played pivotal roles in their development. This post also belongs to the Spotlight on Learn Ultra series.

HCA TEL Learn Ultra Showcase

Starting the 23/24 academic year with a bang, HCA, along with the rest of the university, transitioned from Blackboard Learn to the new and improved Learn Ultra interface. This monumental shift aimed to deliver a more intuitive and accessible experience for both instructors and students. The process involved significant changes in the way courses were delivered online and in person, marking a transformative journey for everyone involved.

The HCA TEL Learn Ultra Showcase, spearheaded by our dedicated Learning Technologists, stands as a testament to this journey. This showcase highlights some of the most exemplary online courses within the School of History, Classics, and Archaeology (HCA) at the University of Edinburgh. Not only

does it feature the innovative courses themselves, but it also provides insightful commentary from course organisers and learning technologists who played pivotal roles in their development.

Breathing Life into Ancient History: Ulf-Dietrich Schoop's Bronze Age Civilizations Course

One standout course in this showcase is Ulf-Dietrich Schoop's "Bronze Age Civilizations of the Near East and Greece." This course is a prime example of how creative use of technology can enhance the learning experience. Schoop, the course organiser, envisioned an immersive virtual exhibition space where students could display their work and explore their peers' contributions. However, his initial vision faced some practical challenges.

"I was thinking about creating a virtual exhibition space for my Honours/MSc level course 'Bronze Age Civilisations' where students could display some of their work for the course and look at other students' efforts," Schoop explains.

"While my original plans were not realistic, Rose suggested ThingLink to me, which proved to be a very interesting tool."

ThingLink, a versatile digital tool, allowed Schoop to create an engaging and interactive learning environment. The idea was to develop a non-linear and playful space that invites students to wander around and discover both expected and unexpected elements. The result is a virtual museum with interconnected rooms, each of which representing different geographical settings covered in the course. The atmosphere of this digital museum is both intriguing and slightly eerie, akin to an "alone-in-a-slightly-creepy museum" feeling.



Ulf-Dietrich Schoop, notes

“The interconnected rooms are AI-generated 360° images; I think the (unintentional) weirdness of the AI imagery works quite well as a contrast to the ‘realness’ of the displays,”

This blend of AI-generated content and student-created displays offers a unique and immersive learning experience. However, the creation of this virtual space was not without its challenges. Schoop realised that adjustments were necessary to accommodate student-generated content.

“The museum is still a bit empty; in particular, student-generated content is missing. I realised that I had to adjust the course format to allow this to be added,” he reflects.

The flexibility of ThingLink proved to be one of its greatest strengths:

“ThingLink seems to be a very versatile tool which can be used in different ways. Neither AI-generated content nor 360° images as in my example here are necessary (I had quite a bit of fun with those, though). It works quite well with other

tools we often use such as Media Hopper content,” Schoop adds.

Mastering Online Teaching: David Kaufman’s Courses on Imperial Game and British Foreign Policy

<https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/shca/wp-content/uploads/sites/1603/2024/08/kaufman-vid.mp4>

Another highlight of the showcase is David Kaufman’s courses: “An Imperial Game? Cricket, Culture & Society (online)” and “Empire or Continent? British Foreign Policy in the Era of the Great War (online).” Kaufman, with extensive experience in writing online courses for the MSc in History, aimed to refine his teaching methods to enhance clarity, accessibility, and flexibility. Kaufman explains:

“My aim for both of these courses was to essentially refine what I had been doing in the previous 8-or-so courses that I had written for the MSc in History (online). Essentially, over the years I have tried to do three things: make the structure as clear as possible for the students to follow, second, to try to provide information to the students (both in terms of how the course will be delivered, as well as what will be the focus of each seminar) on Learn, so that students do not need to contact me during the semester, the answers should be easy to find on the courses, and last, that the course can be delivered to a diverse group of students (in terms of location, availability, specific knowledge of the topic, stage of the programme, etc.),”

Kaufman’s emphasis on providing accessible information to students aligns with Anderson’s (2004) recommendations in “The Theory and Practice of Online Learning.” Anderson advocates for designing online courses that allow students to easily access necessary information and resources without needing to contact instructors frequently, thus fostering a more self-sufficient learning environment.

In “Empire or Continent?”, Kaufman employed a traditional chronological approach, grouping seminars into pre-war, war, post-war, and inter-war periods. This structure aimed to highlight the two main elements of the course while maintaining a coherent timeline.

<https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/shca/wp-content/uploads/sites/1603/2024/08/imperial-game-vid.mp4>

For “An Imperial Game?”, Kaufman took a thematic approach, focusing on class, empire, race, politics, and gender.

“For this course, I wanted to focus more on themes – Class, Empire, Race, Politics, Gender – through linked topics that looked to provide examples of how a sport like cricket was both shaped by these factors, but would allow students to see how cricket could shine new light on these key themes,” Kaufman notes.

The thematic approach in “An Imperial Game?” resonates with the findings of Ke and Xie (2009) who suggest that thematic and problem-based learning approaches in online courses can enhance critical thinking and deeper engagement with the subject matter.

Embracing the Future of Education

The HCA TEL Learn Ultra Showcase not only presents innovative courses but also serves as a platform for sharing best practices and lessons learned. The collaboration between course organisers like Schoop and Kaufman and learning technologists exemplifies the synergy needed to push the boundaries of online education. Their combined efforts result in courses that are not only informative but also engaging and dynamic. As the landscape of education continues to evolve, the HCA TEL Learn Ultra Showcase remains a beacon of innovation, demonstrating the potential of technology to enrich the learning experience. Through the showcase, educators and students alike can explore new possibilities and

embrace the future of online education.

References

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Rose Day



As a Learning Technologist in HCA, Rose provides advice, guidance and support for a number of technology-enhanced learning initiatives. Rose works with staff to support and develop the use of these learning technologies in teaching, learning, assessment and research.

Rose's activities include advocating the use of learning technologies and helping staff with the design, development and evaluation of learning resources. This is achieved through a programme of courses, workshops and events, providing occasional informal 1:1 support, and creating and delivering online support materials.

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What makes HCA so special?

Tanvi shares her experience of being an international student, and the supportive community of School of History, Classics and Archaeology.

Student life in Edinburgh is colourful and multifaceted, and this is something that the University has continued to provide throughout my time as a student here. My experience at the School of History, Classics and Archaeology (HCA) started during Covid so my entire first year was online. I found that as an international student this eased the transition from home to university for me, somewhat. However, at the same time it sometimes made engagement difficult. I found, though, that the University – and especially HCA – strived to remedy this lack of in-person learning. And now, as a third-year student studying full-time in person, I find that the same opinion of student life here holds up.

Academic rigour



The School of History, Classics, and Archaeology provides not only a large variety of degree options, but also an allowance for flexibility and diversity

within those degrees. In addition to a wide range of course options, HCA implements a balanced but academically challenging environment – something that is put in place from

day one.

From my personal experience as a student from the USA, schools don't have an A-level system and the courses offered are general and broad, with no opportunity for Classics or Archaeology backgrounds. I found that even with no prior knowledge of Classical Archaeology and Ancient History – although I was surrounded by peers who had the opportunity to take a Classics A-level – HCA has ensured an all-round and in-depth introduction to the subject. Overall, the class structure, assessment style, and myriad of course opportunities have allowed me to garner the same proficiency in my chosen degree as someone who had prior knowledge of some of the course material. I have found that other international students with a similar background have shared this experience in other degrees.

In addition to literal content, HCA implements an academic system with additional external support from faculty and such tools as the HCA writing centre and peer mentors that result in a higher output of quality of academic work. Three years at HCA have taught me – besides academic content – the professional qualities associated with research, writing, and presentation in regard to my academic work and external projects.

Faculty

The academic opportunities that University of Edinburgh students have are a product of the faculty. The School ensures a broad panel of faculty spanning multiple historical, classical, and archaeological specialties. This not only allows the greater variety of choice for incoming and prospective students in pre-honours, it also allows honours students to choose from a large pool of academics to determine their postgraduate pathways and dissertation topics/guidance. In this way, the HCA faculty pushes students to explore various topics that allow them to experience a very varied

subject area.

Societies



By far some of the most influential engagement among students in HCA comes from the History, Classics and Archaeology societies. As a member of the Archaeology Society, I have found myself not only meeting other students in my course subject, but also other HCA students in HCA through joint society events. By meeting other people in the same subject as me my academic life has improved, which encourages me in my studies. And by gaining access to the wider HCA student network, this has created and sustained an even more warm and welcoming environment in the School.

In addition to the social aspect of the society programs, the academic and professional opportunities awarded to members and attendees is immensely helpful. Through opportunities like conferences and lectures by experts in various fields, the students of HCA have a wonderful chance to widen their academic horizons while also networking amongst academic professionals. And it allows them to browse and gain familiarity with future career opportunities. The Archaeology Fieldwork Fair instituted by the Archaeology Society provides multiple career and fieldwork opportunities annually in addition to other opportunities offered within HCA. The University also has a number of heritage and collections

internship positions for students in the relevant fields, providing valuable experience for the future.

The wider University community

The resources and support available in HCA are supplemented by the environment of the rest of the University, and its faculty and students. The multicultural and diverse surroundings of the University and the wider Edinburgh area is truly something that not only influenced my decision to attend the University, but has deeply affected my current experience here as a student. As an international student, and a person of colour, the University of Edinburgh has created a central community in which students of all backgrounds, interests, and identities can collectively explore the beauty that the city has to offer.

“Forget Hargrove. Read Vere Gordon Childe...”



Vere Gordon Childe

Before Indiana Jones, there was Vere Gordon Childe. The great man – Indiana Jones – recommends him to his students as he skids across a library on the back of a motorbike, but not even he had access to the Vere Gordon Childe Teaching Collection.

The Vere Gordon Childe Teaching Collection is a unique collection. Not only due to the interesting and varied objects it is composed of but also due to its connection with one of the pre-eminent names in the archaeology of British prehistory, and its use to teach generations of University of Edinburgh students. Recently, a group of seven archaeology students supervised by James Harvie (HCA Ancient History and Classical Archaeology alumnus) worked on the Vere Gordon Childe collection over three weeks, checking condition and doing preventative conservation work on the artefacts.

“We’re continuing in the footsteps of a long line of volunteers in caring for and researching the objects in this fascinating collection,” said James Harvie. “Our goal during our time with the collection is to create condition reports for the objects within the collection, identify any objects in need of conservation treatment, and continue some of the projects started by previous volunteers, such as creating appropriate storage conditions.”

An example of the kind of work undertaken are three Egyptian copper alloy statuettes, attached via wires to an information card (likely done in the early years of the collection). The wires were rubbing against and damaging the copper alloy, as well as preventing the students from giving a complete condition report. The statuettes were carefully removed from their backing, allowing them to complete the condition report,

then repacked in a more appropriate manner with acid-free tissue paper and silica gel. As the information card is itself an interesting part of the history of both the collection as a whole and those specific objects, this too was repackaged and placed alongside the statuettes.



A student, wearing latex gloves examines the statuettes.



The statuettes on the original card, the wire ties visible.



Two of the statuettes are removed from the card.

“As a a graduate of the School I knew of and had an interest in this collection, so I got in touch with Dr Guillaume Robin (the current custodian of the collection) to offer my help with its conservation, whilst back in Edinburgh for my summer holidays. This is a great opportunity for myself working with the Vere Gordon Childe Collection, whilst also being able to offer students an insight into the world of conservation. Our thanks go to AOC Archaeology who kindly donated some of the supplies we used in the work.”

You can find out more about the collection and view items with in here – Vere Gordon Childe Collection – and more about his work at the University of Edinburgh here, the tradition of archaeology at Edinburgh.

Darwin Leighton and the Raiders of the Lost Plaque

When History and Archaeology student Tom's outreach project fell foul of Covid, he looked closer to home for inspiration and Footnotes was born.

One day in December I was trawling through reports written by the commercial archaeology firm Oxford Archaeology North about the archaeology that they had found in my local area. Commercial archaeologists survey archaeological remains on behalf of companies and governments, usually to help them make decisions about heritage preservation or building projects. Commercial archaeologists are made to work much quicker than academics, navigating strict deadlines and small budgets. Consequently, their reports are often dry lists of facts with few attempts to make them relevant or exciting to a wider audience. They are often referred to as "grey" literature. Not so that day!

Almost by accident I stumbled onto a description of a plaque dedicated to someone called Darwin Leighton. Intrigued by – if nothing else – his name, I looked him up online. It turned out he lived and died in Bleak House, Kendal. It was then that my obsession began. Why? Because Bleak House is less than 100 metres from where I live, where I am sitting right now. In fact, because my house was a bakery during Darwin's lifetime, it's possible he once stood in the very room I am writing in.

I just had to find the plaque. This would be an ideal story to share for the same reasons it appealed so much to me. It was local and personal, highlighting how archaeology can allow us to explore the lives of humans who lived in the same places we do and – in many ways – lived quite similar lives to us. The problem



was no map was included in the original report, instead just a cryptic reference to another report. The black and white photo of a wall next to some trees was also, to put it mildly, less than illuminating. But I was on the scent and, like Lara Croft or Indiana Jones, I couldn't be stopped. Admittedly – rather than hired guns, intricate booby traps and (sigh) dinosaur infested Aztec ruins – the challenges facing me were local bureaucracy, rain and overgrown bushes. I eventually found the second report and even a vague grid reference for the plaque. Armed with a paper printout, I strode into the woods convinced that determination, guile and grit would find the plaque. They didn't. Hours later, I was stood on the roadside, trying to read my crude map by the light of the setting sun. Then, it struck me and all at once I understood the meaning of the map. The plaque was metres away from me. There were two paths I could take, a long route following footpaths or a much shorter route through some bushes. Seconds later, I had found it! "Archaeologists are a peculiar bunch" I thought to myself, pulling twigs out my hair.



Why was I doing all of this? I was enrolled in the course Geoscience Outreach and Engagement, where each student organises their own outreach project in order to share something about our university course with the public. My original plan, a tour of Edinburgh's archaeology, had been scuppered by the second wave of coronavirus in the UK,

forcing me to return home to Kendal, Cumbria. Instead, I decided to make a series of short videos highlighting the unsung archaeology of my local area to, firstly, teach the people around me about the archaeology of my home town, and to tell stories that are deeply personal about the people who lived here in the past, many of whom were just like me. But I realised that, especially at the moment, not many of the people who watch will be able to visit Kendal so I also strive to teach broader lessons about what archaeology can teach us and how people can make their own discoveries.

Four videos are now on YouTube on the Footnotes channel covering lime kilns, time guns and ridges and furrows. And Darwin Leighton, of course.

You can watch all Tom's videos on the Footnotes channel on YouTube.