

Excavating the Medieval Anarchy Period in South Gloucestershire, England

An opportunity to learn archaeology in the Hazel Anarchy Research Project, in one of Britain's most spectacular historical landscapes.

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The Anarchy in the UK (1135-1153 CE), was a time of rivalry, fear, and violence, between the sides of Empress Matilda and King Stephen for the throne of England and Normandy. The story started with the drowning of Henry I's illegitimate son William Adelin in a shipwreck, and Henry's attempts to install his daughter Matilda as Queen. His nephew, Stephen of Blois, seized the throne with the help of his brother the Bishop of Winchester. Barons of the North, Welsh leaders, and Scottish invaders were further perplexing the story in the early days as all sought to increase their respective positions, before Matilda with the help of her half-brother Robert of Gloucester decided to invade England across the sea in 1139.

Matilda then launched an all-out campaign to win back the crown, plunging the country into a civil war. In response to the crisis, nobles built still more castles, and rivals to the king set up their own mints and produced new coinage. Churches were fortified and the peasantry suffered deprivation as armies crisscrossed the country, ravaging estates and burning property.

To date archaeological research for the Anarchy Period has focused mainly upon castles, either of earth and timber or stone built. Excavations at the Lower Hazel building complex are an integral part of the Hazel Anarchy Research Project (HARP), comprising a five-year training and community research project based at the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology of the University of Bristol. This project aims to provide undergraduate students with practical archaeological skills and experience as they investigate the social dynamics of the Anarchy period (1135 – 1153) in the South West of England with the Lower Hazel building complex and its wider landscape as a case study. The Lower Hazel building complex will provide a unique opportunity for archaeological recording of the social dynamics within the rural population that supported the different parties. The building complex is also located in an area with a strong Bronze Age, Iron Age, and Roman presence, which will also be examined by the project team.

Our excavation and recording archaeology course provides a solid grounding in anthropological archaeology theory and practice. We provide the best possible hands-on technical and academic training for students from around the world. With your participation in HARP you will learn not only about the real stories that influenced major modern TV shows, but you will also learn excavation techniques, and you will use cutting edge geophysics and photogrammetry equipment including Ground Penetrating Radar, Magnetometry, and Airborne photogrammetry. HARP runs a well-known Social Media team that can provide participants with valuable transferable skills that exceed the limits of Anthropological Archaeology practice.