

EXPLORING LOCAL PLACES

DESK BASED ASSESSMENT CASE STUDY

Archaeologists would complete a desk based assessment before venturing out so before you go out exploring your local area why not complete your own Desk Based Assessment first?

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Desk Based Assessment: Case Study

Researching local history can be a rewarding undertaking and there are links to all sorts of sites and resources in the reference section at the end of this study. Some of those links can be used to complement your desk based assessment depending on what exists at the site you are looking at.

For the purposes of a simple examination, however, we will focus on the Heritage Gateway. The gateway includes, amongst other things, information from the Historic Environment Record, Historic England, and the Archaeological Data Service. Other sources we will look at are the Portable Antiquities Scheme for a list of metal objects found by metal detectorists like jewellery and coins, geological data about the formation of the land itself, and old Ordnance Survey maps which can offer us clues about how a place may have changed and evolved.

The example we will use in this case study is in Lincolnshire but this kind of assessment can be applied to any location in England. Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland can vary a little due to some differences in devolved government departments having slightly different rules, but the principle remains the same.

To really understand a place we need to look closely at what historic and archaeological evidence exists. It is a good idea to record what we see so that we keep a note of our research. A map is a good starting point.

Ulceby Cross, Lincolnshire

Using [Google Maps \(click here\)](#) you can see that Ulceby Cross is sited on the A16 / A1104 / A1028 crossroads between Grimsby and Boston. Using street view you can see that it has a Spar service station and agricultural machinery site on one side, and an abandoned motel on the other. It is approximately three miles west of the Georgian market town of Alford and a mile north of the village of Ulceby. The crossroads have a roundabout to manage traffic flow.

If we look at the geological survey data from the [British Geological Survey \(click here\)](#) can see that Ulceby Cross sits on a limestone ridge at the eastern edge of the Lincolnshire Wolds. Agricultural land surrounds it and on the surface it is a simple countryside location with a steady stream of travellers stopping only for fuel and coffee on their way to other destinations. Though architecturally unimpressive, Ulceby Cross, like many other places in the world, is not as historically bleak or barren as it may seem.

The buildings positioned at the crossroads look relatively modern and probably date from the mid to late 20th century. You can research this simply by looking at an old ordinance survey map of [Ulceby from 1887 \(click here\)](#) (Fig 1) and comparing it with Google Maps (fig 2) to look for any differences. Building architecture is something that takes a while to learn, especially as a building may look one way but have an invisible history disguised with a more modern facelift. It even takes professionals a while to get their eye in.

It can help to check for any listed buildings in your area by looking at the historic buildings list at [Historic England \(click here\)](#) or, for ecclesiastical architecture, the [Church Architectural Records \(click here\)](#). Listings will give a really good idea of why a building is important, an explanation of its architecture and, most importantly, an accurate account of its history.

Ulceby Cross, Lincolnshire



Fig 1 - 1887 6" OS Map of Ulceby Cross, Lincolnshire. © copyright 2021 National Library of Scotland

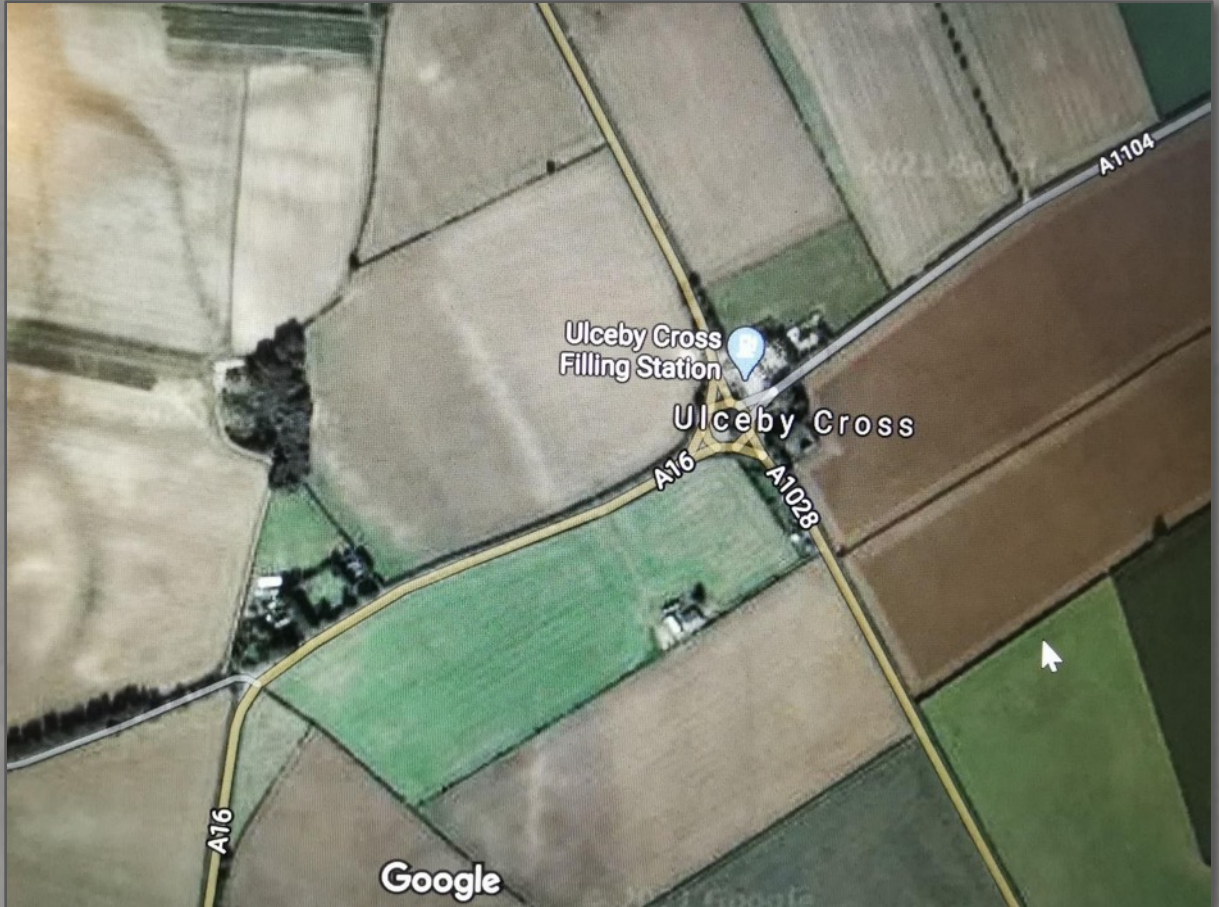


Fig 2 - Current Satellite view of Ulceby Cross, Lincolnshire. © copyright 2021 Google Maps.

On the 1877 map you can see that there is evidence on the east side of the crossroads of a building where the abandoned hotel now sits but, where the service station and agricultural site now stand to the north, there is nothing.

From this we can say that no buildings existed on that site in 1877 when the map was created. By looking at the site of the abandoned motel using Google Street-view it can be seen that the building architecture looks far more modern than 1877. It is therefore probable that the motel was built on the site of an earlier building which would have been demolished. There is a building to the south that was recorded on the 1877 map when the area was surveyed and which still exists today. The building to the west on the A16 did not exist on the 1877 map. So we can see that whilst there has been some development at Ulceby Cross over the last 140 years it has not significantly changed.

Whilst there are older maps for the avid history detective to find, the earliest reliable ones were the ordinance survey maps dating back to 1801 and the Georgian era. However, not everywhere was mapped at once and it was not until the Victorian period of 1860 - 80's that many places in the UK were fully surveyed. The best maps are 6" to one mile as they give the greatest level of detail but again these do not exist at every location. So do not be surprised if the area you are looking at does not have really early maps.

So how do we start peeling back the layers of history at Ulceby Cross? Start with this link to the [Heritage Gateway \(click here\)](#). The new website, recently launched is the [Lincolnshire Heritage Explorer \(click here\)](#). Type 'Ulceby Cross' in the search box with the where tab selected. Then click 'search.' You will see a list of results come up including the Lincolnshire Historic Environment Record (HER) and the National Monument Record (NMR). The NMR results take information about all known archaeological work linked to the Archaeological Data Service (ADS). For Ulceby Cross you will see three results for the NMR and twenty for Lincolnshire HER. There are lots of other headings on the list but they have no entries so you can ignore them. The NMR results will show you that there are three records about past archaeological investigations that have found artefacts from the early Bronze Age (3000 - 2100 BCE) through to and beyond the Medieval period (1535 CE).

These artefacts include flint tools, metal finds, pottery, and earthworks. The records show a brief overview of what, when, and where the digs took place. You can find a little more information from each record by clicking on the 'view this item on the archaeological data service' link at the top of the page. For the digs that are listed there is very little information stored, but what they do tell you is the age of the artefacts that have been found at Ulceby Cross.

So just from this first link we can see that people have used the site for over 5000 of years. In the field to the West of the crossroads there is evidence of a ploughed-out long barrow - [Historic England \(click here\)](#) list four scheduled monuments at Ulceby with Fordington less than a mile to the East that date to the Neolithic period (10,000 - 4,500 BCE) and these remains could be from a similar time.

If you go back to [Google Maps \(click here\)](#) and use satellite view you can see strange marks and shadows in some of the fields - marks and shadows that could be evidence of old earthworks, buildings, or walls that have long since vanished. Soil and crop marks are caused by alterations in land drainage and are great ways to hunt for clues to what may have existed in the past especially buildings and earthworks. Long barrows were widespread throughout Europe and, whilst there is debate, are generally believed to be important religious sites for ancestor veneration, burial, and possibly even territorial markers. Most of them are now scheduled monuments and protected by law due to their rarity and historic significance.

What this means for Ulceby Cross is that we can potentially trace its history back as far as 5,000 BCE to when long barrows are believed to have been appearing in Britain. We can now suggest that there is evidence to support the idea that Ulceby Cross has been in use for 7,000 years.

If you look at the [Portable Antiques Scheme \(click here\)](#) and search for Ulceby Cross (using the database tab at the top of the page and then the search database function), you should get 291 listings come up. These listings range from Iron Age brooches, Roman and later coins, medieval belt buckles, and post medieval objects. What this tells us is that, like ourselves, people lost things or discarded damaged items. Or they gave gifts to the Gods in the form of precious jewellery or coins. Whichever way you choose to interpret the evidence, 291 objects have been reported to the scheme from a very small area which supports the idea that it has been a well-used crossroads for a very long time.

Interpreting the Evidence - Telling a Story

Archaeology is the study of the physical objects and artefacts people have left behind. Those objects and artefacts help us tell the story of human culture and show us an insight into the lives people lived.

So what story could the archaeology tell us about Ulceby Cross? Could it always have been a place where wanderers stopped? It is amazing how far people used to travel so having somewhere to rest and eat has always been very important. Where the Spar now sells hot pasties and petrol, did the Romans stop to buy horse feed and roast pig? There have been enough coins left behind to suggest that money was changing hands there for thousands of years.

There is evidence of human activity at Ulceby Cross that spans around 280 generations of human history and includes Stone Age peoples, Britons, Celts, Romans, Saxons, Vikings, and people all the way through the corridors of history to where you now sit reading about doing a desk based assessment. How would you interpret the evidence?

All you have to do now is pick a place.

Good luck on your journey!

Footnote

Whilst there is a vast amount of information known about the history of the UK both in written history and through archaeology, there are many areas that have never been dug or written about. There are lots of reports and pictures that have yet to be published or uploaded to the internet and so are not available online. These are often referred to as 'grey pages.' Some of these are available through the local HER by appointment, and some are in Museum archives but you have to know they exist to request to see them.

Many older archaeological excavations have no existing reports, or the reports and finds have never been deposited in a museum. It is far from a perfect science and sometimes you need to be a dedicated detective to find the right crumbs to follow. The beauty is that you can do as much or as little research as you like.

If you get stuck phone or email your local Historic Environment Record - Lincolnshire Heritage Explorer and ask them if they have any unpublished information about the site you are interested in. Try the same with your local museum. People are usually very happy to help.

Glossary of Terms

ADS - Archaeological Data Service
BC - Before Christ
BCE - Before Common Era
CE - Common Era
DBA - Desk Based Assessment
DTA - Desk Top Assessment same as DBA
BGS - British Geological Survey
CAR - Church Architectural Records
EH - English Heritage
ETHOS - PhD Portal for doctoral thesis
HE - Historic England
HER - Historic Environment Record
JSTOR - Online portal for academic journals
NA - National Archives
NMR - National Monuments Record
OASIS - Now the ADS
OS - Ordnance Survey
PAS - Portable Antiquities Scheme
Pre - What came before
Post - What came after
SMR - Sites and Monuments Record

Some useful contacts for your research

Academic Journals	www.jstor.org
Aerial Photography	www.britainfromabove.org.uk
Archaeological Data Service (ADS)	www.archaeologydataservice.ac.uk
Archives	www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/history-heritage/lincolnshire-archives/2
British Geological Survey	www.mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html
Church Architecture Records	www.facultyonline.churchofengland.org/about-the-church-heritage-record
<u>EThOS</u> for PhD thesis articles	www.ethos.bl.uk/Home.do
Google Scholar: scholarly eBooks	www.scholar.google.com/
Historic England National Heritage List for England (NHLE):	www.historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/
Heritage Connect - the history and character areas of Lincoln	www.heritageconnectlincoln.com/character-area-a-z
Lincolnshire Historic Environment Record: Heritage Gateway	www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway
Lincs to the Past	www.lincstothepast.com/
Museum for archaeology	www.thecollectionmuseum.com
National Archives	www.nationalarchives.gov.uk
Old 6" Ordnance Survey Maps	www.maps.nls.uk/os/6inch-england-and-wales
Portable Antiquities Scheme	www.finds.org.uk
Project Gutenberg free eBooks	www.gutenberg.org
Satellite images	www.google.com/maps
Wikipedia for good sources	www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_page
Directories are also useful e.g. <u>Kellys</u> and Whites, Local archives (the Victorian idea of the Yellow Pages)	
Visit the local history section of your nearest library or visit the Museum of Lincolnshire Life to research social history	

Have a great time Exploring Local Places!