

Project: Neolithic Bow Transcript (I), 2020



Daughter: Did you in 1996? Did you practice before you did this first?

Father: No, no, it was a bit of a high risk strategy really to be honest. I'd looked into what I think, or what I thought I might need to do to do this out sourced all the materials I could. But there was only going to be one chance to do this and one of the things I noticed by looking at this clip. And then the other clip from this is that I'm swapping hands virtually every minute, every second every 30 seconds. The reason for that are my hands are ambidextrous, but I couldn't keep going with one hand, it needed the two. I mean, I wasn't used to physical work in that sense. And this was all completely experimental for me, let alone the archaeological bit that I was trying to demonstrate for the A-level.

D: I'm impressed that you're actually quite accurate for this. Because I know that if I was trying to do something like this, I wouldn't be able to get it so straight. So I thought it was quite impressive.

F: Well, to be honest, I had little option to try and get this done in one go. I set myself two days to

complete all of this, because to be honest, I was at work on the Friday, also work on the Monday. And I had no concept of how long this would take. I think at some point or another, I started to wonder whether I'd probably bit off more than I could chew. But the whole point of this was to be experimental. And you can be at the very bottom of the of the chain of ability doing this. I was not setting myself out as having any abilities with any of these tools or any of the materials I've just done work these things.

D: So why did you decide to do this? Like at this point in time?

F: Erika, my wife, she's sort of put me on to the archaeology Oh level at the local college, mainly because of the stress of the job I was on during the amount of work I was doing. It was quite stressful. And the America said, Well, why don't you do something completely different? And I sort of said, there's no way I've got time for this. What Why bother, I just might as well just crack on with the job and all that but anyway, I thought long and hard always been interested in history and archaeology in a very sort of amateur sort of way. So as it's only over the The road the waterfront as it was in Wolverhampton and still is, I feel really stupid not to walk over there. So I went over and gave the level of chance. And not that I'm particularly keen on getting any more levels and a levels, although, you know, looking back on it, it was quite nice to get both of them but just started to join in the classes and I really got involved in it for the love of it really. In 1996, I would have been six years old, and we were working full time.

D: So you were having to do this on weekends, evenings.

F: Yeah, it actually worked. It's like it took away the stress of the job because my focus became this. And the job became secondary, in a way although the level I was performing, I wasn't, I didn't have to worry about the job anymore. I was more fired up about getting immersed in this.

D: Yeah, it's my like, it's really funny to see this video, because my experience, my memories of this happening are very, very different. And I remember most of these objects being around at home. I remember you sharing me things I remember the wood chippings on floor, I remember all these different aspects of it. And I don't remember it. Remember mum standing there with a video camcorder. I don't remember any of that. But I remember the tools and the chickens on the floor. And I remember the kidnapping and showing me bits and pieces. And I just thought it was really quite magical, really. I just thought I didn't think anything of it. I didn't think it was a strange thing. It was just such a normal thing in our household. But it's just really nice to kind of see that footage. But did you find that you learned more reenacting that process, rather than just the text based kind of research? Because I know that if you show me in your life, or your project bits and pieces, that was a lot of text, a lot of research that you did, and visiting places and visiting people. But we actually kind of performing the processes. Did you find that you learned more from that or, or rather than research?

F: No, it's it seemed to me to be splitting in very much in two halves. There's the sort of literary academic side of it, which is reading all about it. I it was, for me, it was an original idea when I did this. So it wasn't something I'd read about anybody else doing. I actually in my sort of amateur sort of

way, under pressure all the time wise, I probably didn't read enough about any of this. But at the end of the day, I thought this to me was a unique. For me, it was a unique idea of a project. I subsequently found out that somebody else had already done this, or I don't know in the 1960s. And they made a really fantastic job of it on like the sort of amateurish approach and everything else. But on the other hand, it didn't matter. This, for me was a unique thing for me at the time. So I was quite pleased with myself about that. But actually, going out to source the materials and fetch the materials, again, was akin to what I did in my job. And so I was used to getting in the car and going to places nobody would, you know, I wouldn't normally go to so that wasn't a problem. But actually doing this. Yeah, I mean, I suddenly reversed everything I thought and when I was growing up and being educated, one of the biggest problems I think I had I've gotten to the point of a lot of it. So academic, I was never going to be particularly when I was growing up with my childhood and all the rest of it. It was very much out in the streets, and experimental living really and growing up and it was great. And so this Absolutely, I mean, the reason I left all the chippings where they were I measured them all and photographed them all is because you know, that's part of the archaeology of it. If you go in and see bits of Fleet all over the place, as an archaeologist, you want to know why they're there and the spread of them and what that means. So I tried to be as pure as I could with what I knew, which was a very, you know, A-level basically. But I gained a complete and utter insight into what I couldn't do, and how I wasn't built any more for any of this really. And at the end of two days, I could hardly move my fingers. I didn't know whether I was going to take time off work to be on because I actually couldn't move my fingers. And so I learned

about materials, how difficult it is, but also how ill prepared I would be if any of these tools got lost or broke. But then again, I started off on the basis that I had no skills, I had no knowledge. And I was just using logic, common sense and where possible, the actual source type of tool, I have to use modern tools to start myself off, I couldn't have done this in the time I was allowing myself. And I've made that clear in my project. So it's not 100%. But all of this was done with these tools. And I was astounded, really, how I was able to do what I did,

D: I thought it's quite interesting, how have you use tools to make the tools, which then made and helps you make this boat, that the process of making the tools meant that there was a value on each tool that you were using to get to get to this particular point. And I thought that was, that's quite interesting. And remember, you helped me make my own flintknapping kit, I specifically remember an old biscuit in the eyes to keep it in mind, remember that it was white with red chips on. And in that turn, I had a range of different shaped stones, and a patch of leather, and a little bit of antler to flake off the things. And I also remember her safety goals as well. Because you're, very into your health and safety.

D: But yeah, I remember doing that. And it was just so. So interesting to me. And it has had such a massive impact on how on my interests and what I draw upon for inspiration. But do you remember how Chris felt about this, he was four years older than me. He didn't have any kind of interest in this. Just out of interest.

F: Yeah, Chris had a Chris had an interest in everything. We, we'd always try to encourage taking you both to places to see and experience as much of

what we were interested in and diverse things that, you know, maybe we wouldn't have initially been interested in. So we want to try to get you down to the museums in London, the natural history, British Museum Science Museum, National Portrait Gallery is all those things in short hits, so that you get the most out of seeing things rather than listening to us all the time. And locally, we took you to every place, we could find that we could actually let you experience and ask the questions because we couldn't replace your teachers in a lot of ways we weren't up to the sort of standards of GCSEs and whatever you were doing at the time, so we tried to but the idea was to make it fun and interesting. And you were both always very, very interested. It was always one of you around on top of us doing whatever we were doing. And we followed those things. We never tried to push it on to you. So this obviously we're seeing the garden as my most my project. But I can I went up with I imagine you can probably imagine that, Chris, and you will both in the garden, both in the house, doing what you were doing. And yet Chris, Chris was always interested and always inquisitive. And that was great. That was the bonus of having children for us was that we all interacted in this way, and got as much out of it as we could.

D: Yeah, I particularly remember me and Chris, were just obsessed with making bows and arrows. And I remember a lot of

F: I remember

D: Particularly going to kind of Chase and trying to look for the perfect stick or piece of words that would kind of translate into a bow. And remember that really fondly. Yeah.

F: Yeah. Well, that's one of the things that when I was growing up in some part of my life, we didn't have a television. There were certainly no computers. There were no mobile phones. We didn't have a phone. So children basically then you wave goodbye to your parents at a certain age of around, you know breakfast time and you wouldn't see him again until he got hungry and went back for dinner. But you'd be with your friends in the street. Everything went on around your house and in the street and you made your own your own interests. And, you know, we all collected everything stones, leaves, you name it, we had that target where we all were encouraged to have hobbies and collect. And we learned a lot from all of that. And we swap things and all the rest of it. And then as TV came in, we were influenced by a lot of the sort of childhood films that we've never even had a chance to see. So yeah, my interest in both bows and arrows probably comes from Errol Flynn and the Robin Hood film, which I must have seen 3000 times by the time I was 12.

D: Just, I was just looking at the video and moved on to a different tool. You made some form of hand axe?

F: Yeah, well, that's this, this was the- I don't you can see that. Yeah. This is this is what John Lord, the claim number who is responsible for enabling me to do this, he made that and it's actually a different shape. This being the actual mounting for it. This is what I cut off our damson and true. And it's basically just a trunk with a branch.

D: I didn't know that was from the damson in tree

F: tree, you can see that, that's the one working on now. And, and so fashion that out and then that went into there. And then I just had to guess of

how to get that to stay in one place. And that's just leather wrapped around in wet, wet leather top sort of put pushed back inside itself so that when it drip-dried out, it shrunk. I didn't know any other way doing it. Now in truth, it sort of worked to a degree but you're constantly having problems keeping these things in. And so even just sticking things into things is something that would have taken probably, you know, months and months and months of trial and error to even perfect even if I could find the materials, I tried all sorts of glue that I'd read about birch bark tar. In the end doctor, pinch for the arrowhead, my wife's violin rotting block that you put on the strings that disappeared and got melted down pretty quick. And so it's all it was experimental, because I couldn't source a lot of the materials, I just didn't know where to get them from you couldn't in Wolverhampton. I mean, I went into butchers to find tendons of cows, and they just thought I was mad. You know, what do you mean tendons? Well, I want the stringy bits out of a cow. So I can try and make a bowstring. I mean, it was just impossible. So I did have to improvise to get this thing finished. But yeah, it was all experimental. And it taught me an awful lot about starting something, planning it, finding it not going to plan and finishing it. And that was a really important lesson for me.

D: Yeah. Did you think at any point that it might go wrong, as you were kind of filming it in one tape? And no, because I find it impossible for you to get as far as you have done. And without any kind of practice or breakthrough using tools that are unfamiliar to you.

F: The only thing that bothered me, I mean, this this tool, which was the main tool that I used, and again, you know, John Lord made that. And what I

learned from that was that he could go into a forest somewhere, and he could survive by making all this stuff as long as he got Flint, of course. And, you know, he would have absolutely no problem. What taught me was that the end of this either struggled, but I'd still come out with something that would have suited, you know, hunter gatherers, maybe you know, x 1000 years ago, but this tool was the one that I relied on, because one it went into and still does go into the into the tool itself. And it's simply gravity. And as you're thinking that way, you could still use that. But what I wasn't able to do was nibble the edges and sharpen it again. I didn't really want to do that in case it ruined it. And the skill that you pick up with acquired usage and practice is how to resharpen it because you can resharpen them and replace them. I couldn't. So whenever I did that have to be done in a weekend or any in any event. Even if I hadn't finished it I would have submitted what I had done and form conclusions about it from an expand that's what experimental archaeology is nothing to say. It's got to work. So that was the best I could do was do the best I could over a weekend. But as I say, I had appointments on the Monday work, I have to go and do so it had to be finished by Sunday.

D: So you made you made the bow in one week, basically.

F: Yeah, I mean, the actual cleaving of the trunk, which was from Ironbridge green trust place, and the cleaving of that, and cleaning it again, these were some of the preparatory things I did. But the actual fashioning from the the tash wood, which was sort of green wood, therefore workable, that was all done in 48 hours. I've got all the tools prepared. And I had to have the rest in between. I mean, I worked as

long as I could in the garden, some of the time, I had to get back in the garage and work at night on it, because of the lights and everything else. But I hadn't really got much choice this was going to get done in 48 hours.

D: Not to interrupt you, but it's a clock in the background. I don't know.

F: I've got a feeling that probably to do with the amount of minutes Erika's got on the camera. I mean, the camera itself was the size of it was the size of a suitcase. I mean, you know, in those days, like, it wasn't hand-held, it was shoulder held. You know, we probably got and of course, the other thing is how boring with this film footage be if we'd have taped or you know, recorded every minute of this event, you know, it would be confined to the dustbin. So at the end of the day, we have to use some sort of edit, you know, criterion. And min Erica couldn't hold the thing on a shoulder for much longer than whatever the period was. So I don't know what I don't know whether I recorded the timings of this. I probably did. Somewhere, just a half hour we'd gone. But yeah, we have to have breaks. I mean, am I the worry that I had was whether my hands would hold up? I mean, I got blisters?

D: Yeah, I can imagine.

F: So interesting. I think it's because the camera had a certain time on the film footage. We sort of knew when the when the camera was gonna stop when we had to have a plan on that, but I can't remember what it was. And it was probably 14 minutes at a time.

D: So when you finish the bow. And so you try to get work, did you find that it worked well?

F: The end result of this, I knew I hadn't got the symmetry, using these tools. And I certainly hadn't got the ability and the knowledge and the craftsmanship to equal the balance of each limb from the middle to each end has to be identical. And medieval Bowman were able to do this and Craftsman can do it and people skilled at this, my bow was just the bottom end of an attempt. And it's also quite large for this type of period bow. I mean, the original bow was considered probably ceremonial and that are broken in half. And I think mine was destined for the same. Same sort of fate really because it wasn't balanced. But my biggest problem was and I hadn't thought this out is I didn't really think about the end testing results. And where I was going to do that I didn't want to go to a park, a public place in Wolverhampton with this in an arrow. I thought that wasn't a good idea. And then secondly, I became aware that the only place I've got was the My God in the back of our garden. And then as you know, across a rather low fence the allotments are and I thought well, I don't know what the heck's going to happen when I pull this bow and shoot the arrow is he when he flies straight when he go over the fence, I don't know sort of name anybody on the line. So I actually didn't film The end result. But he did the arrow did without me pulling the boat too hard get to the bottom of the fence line. So it worked. I don't know how many times I could have done that successfully, or if I'd really tested the boat but I was a bit worried about my own safety in case it snapped.

D: Suppose it's more about the process is just as important as the finished item or the results. I suppose The process of constructing it and making the tools and creating the bow are just as valuable to your knowledge base as the actual bow whether it

works or not.

F: Absolutely. And it also realises that we're all in a different time frame, that's what made me very aware of the factors are having to give myself a timeframe at all. Whereas I imagine, nobody knows, nobody can tell you this, but I imagine that people who are doing this, you know, 10,000 years ago, whatever it was, would not be looking at a clock, and they certainly wouldn't be worried they might have to stress us in other ways. But I just know that I'm in a different time frame.

D: It's gonna say that there might not be a clock, they might be looking at their dinner.

F: Exactly. on the move. Yeah, walking away from them. So yeah, I understand all of that. And when I was split, went to see flintknapping being demonstrated by John Lord is very kindly prepared to spend time with me on a flint quarry. And he showed me some techniques. And I actually tried to do a little bit while I was with him, but his time frame was for me really difficult to understand, because he just sit and look at the flint and intuitive assess it, and they look at it, and I'd be in my mind, and you come on, look at the dialogue. And he wouldn't, he would just work at his own pace, he knew exactly what he was doing. He was absolute Craftsman master at it. And, and that's why I really put me in my place in one sense, which on you, I was starting off rock bottom. And I was, I mean, I converted a lot of flint into a lot of pebble the bits all over the garbage floor trying to get anything out. And I did get a few bits out. And some of the tools I used, you know, the flakes that I used, I got made, and I made a hand axe after a fashion but I wouldn't have been able to have done the job with it didn't think it wouldn't have

fitted in anything, basically, because it wasn't so symmetrical. It made you realise everything you do today, you have to go backwards and read Kindle, the muscle power, the timeframes, everything, it was a real insight, just trying to do something like that, I learned a lot more, I had a far greater respect for the skills that these people must have had.

D: So I find it so impressive that you're able to, I feel like that's quite accurate. First timer. Like at that point, I'm just watching this video, that was actually really impressive. It as you start to change your hands, I do notice you change your hands a lot.

F: I have to when I'm changing my hands, it's because I can't feel the other one anymore. So I that was my biggest fear is that my hands would literally not work to finish this off in any way, shape or form. And I mean, that's why, in lots of ways, I don't know if I should have spread it out over a longer period, I wouldn't have felt happy. I mean, I, I think that it was a sensible thing. Nobody knows the timeframe it would take to do this, except that when you looked at the original bone, or the half of the bone that exists in Cambridge, one of the universities in Cambridge, when I went to look at it, I just couldn't believe it. It looked like it had been made today, as a piece of modern furniture. It was that symmetrical. I took a micrometre and it was virtually symmetrical all the way up. The finish was as good as any piece of oak furniture from the Edwardian period. It was unbelievable.

I mean, show me the photos actually, it did look like it was manufactured. Like it had such an incredible finish that you couldn't possibly believe it was created by hand, didn't have a hand made quality to it. It was like a piece of furniture. It was so

s m o o t h .

It was a it was a stunning work of art, whatever it was, and whatever it was for good or bad that was inspired by one of our trips when we went to the Somerset levels. And we went to the Iron Age village and saw that I know it's not the same period as the bow but that's where I think I got the original inspiration or feeling from when we bought some of those books from the gift shop and that's places

D: They are both looking quite impressive. Now it's got a bit of a bend.

F: It's got a bit of a bend. I think what happened with that it was it was going all right. And then I think one and more than the other and the other end down thickness of it but I'd run out of steam by this time I think and I thought Look, it looks like a bow. It bends like a bow. It is about so I think I put I put a full stop at some stage before I actually ruined it.

At this point, as I'm looking at my hands there, I'm obviously very happy with the, with the way. Well, it started to actually starting to look like what I'd intended it to look like. And until then, it was a bit, it was a bit stressful, really wondering whether these tools would actually do the job. But as you got into it, and you started to get the angle of the blade down onto the wood properly, as opposed to being a bit sort of pressures with it, it started to take off and more wood, and then I started to get happier it booked. So at the same time, some of the tools were getting more blunt. And that one I'm holding there, which I sort of call a spoke-shave I have to put a handle like that on it because he will rip my hands to shreds. And I don't I don't know whether or how they would have done it. But just making things that have a tool and

these tools would actually do the job. But as you got into it, and you started to get the angle of the blade down onto the wood properly, as opposed to being a bit sort of pressures with it, it started to take off and more wood, and then I started to get happier it booked. So at the same time, some of the tools were getting more blunt. And that one I'm holding there, which I sort of call a spoke-shave I have to put a handle like that on it because he will rip my hands to shreds. And I don't I don't know whether or how they would have done it. But just making things that have a tool and a jammed in. And then you've got to sort of hold it in place that the skill of what they must have learned over centuries is phenomenal. I mean, using natural glues, and resins and stuff like this, I just couldn't find that stuff. You know, I thought about trying to light the wooden fire to melt some of the birch bark tie using IITs and the Flint and I've still got the bits and pieces there that came from Christopher's rock collection. If you ever wondered where that went, things disappeared from people's collections. There's a little bit of the roses that should be now be able to play the violin properly by now she's still got up. So yeah, it's a case of all hands to the pump really. So collections got robbed at that point.

D: Thanks for all of our stones and shells.

F: When we used to go to Barmouth beach, and we go on the on the beach there and we'd see Flint nodules fling pebbles on the beach. I mean, the thing that you pick up is when you looked those and I remember saying to one maybe Chris, maybe you we can't do anything with these,

we can't try when

flintknapping with these because they're hardened off to the elements and are brittle, they will not work. And that's what John Lord taught me in that day that I spent with him or the afternoon I was within the when you freshly quarry things they behave differently.

D: Notice you're looking in the distance

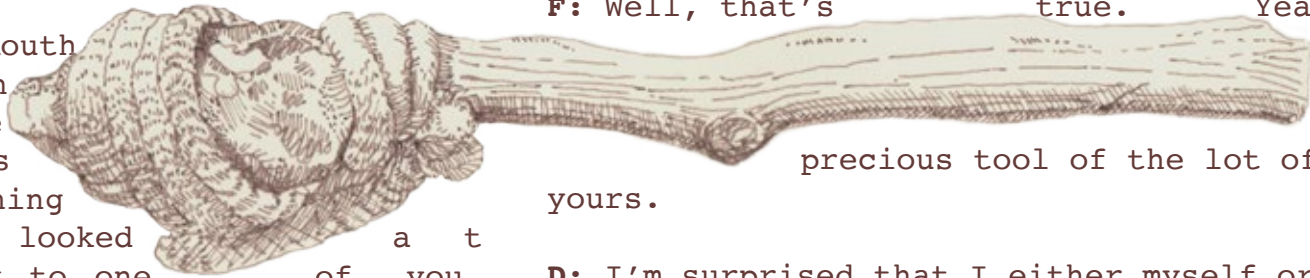
F: Did you are you notice that? Well, it's probably me thinking Don't come any closer. Now I'm using an axe or something or not. But at some point when I got to a heart not you know, I don't know how they got around these things. But there's no way in my mind abilities would deal with that. So to get the job done, there were a few shortcuts but not many. I tried to be as genuine as I could about it. And as obvious I need all went in the project I didn't sort of make out I didn't use modern tools at times for that too. But mostly all 98% of all that work on those things were done with flint.

And you do get better the more you use it, the better you get. Oh, that's me thinking what she doing what she did remind me.

D: You're standing in front of my house.

F: Well, that's true. Yeah, I did use that area. And because the most precious tool of the lot of course was yours.

D: I'm surprised that I either myself or Chris didn't interrupt you sooner. And thinking about it. We were out in the garden trying to film this tape in one shot on one week. And probably your only window. And



surprising that you could find any time to complete this project, especially with having to do with camera work for yourself.

F: But don't think we had any difficulties with that. You always had these interests that kept you, you know, really involved with yourself and what you were doing. And yeah, you'd have just seen that and wondered whatever it was, you're wondering, but you were very good. With it, we didn't have any problems at all. And as I say, we had rests and breaks in between, we needed the brakes. And so probably did you need some attentions in some areas, you know, food, etc. So, it all worked out perfectly well. And yeah, as long as I can see, I've got my mug of tea down there. I'm sure that's not archaeologically sourced for as long as I've got that I'm on my way I could do almost anything with a cup of tea.

D: Yeah. And not that she's changed has it? Was it to enhance

F: that to work, right. I mean, I was really pleased with that. I actually could do something with that. And I was really pleased that was working. Because without looked quite rough. But yeah, it's all practice it, it just proves the point that you can't expect to master anything new, straight away. And when you when in their case, their survival depended on mastered mastering this, you know, it's passed on from one generation down to the next. And the materials were there to be utilised, I guess. But no, it's fast, fascinating time. And yet, I can't really believe that I was able to do anything and my normal work and running, you know, with two children as well as demands of schools and whatever, but it can be done and it actually alleviated the stress, it actually took me away from work related stress, which everybody has to put up with nowadays, we did it the same time as that. It was interesting that when, when one of the big

influences, I mean, I know bows and arrows run through by sort of childhood and all the way through really, I don't know why particularly but when I was looking into my own level at the the excavation, underwater excavation of the Mary Rose, actor Thomas, Tom Hart, and Thomas Hardy, Robert Hardy, he was an expert on medieval Bose. And he was actually put one to test on a board where he was pulling the string down to draw the arms of the bow down symmetrically, and one snapped off. And it explained all that about how these Craftsmen would, would balance each limb up equally. And, you know, I couldn't do that within the time frame. But I knew the weakness. That's the thing is, I could see where the weakness was.

We all watch that sort of thing. Because, you know, you will prove the point, isn't it? You remember, you remember that? And we remember that. But these were the things that were interesting. And they were factual and are experimental. And we tried to do as much of that as possible because we were interested in it and the fact that you were and Chris certainly was, was a testament to the sort of educational interest that you had in real, real education. Rather than being forced fed through a machine as it were.

D: I definitely agree with you in terms of like the, the real education because every aspect of, of history that I've learned or been exposed to, as a child, it was never It was never two-dimensional. It was never through just reading, although they'd be pictures and texts and things, there was always a real, a realistic element to it, whether it was through a coin or through the process of there was always a risk element to those things. And it's just, I remember as if it was yesterday. And, and it's such a strong reference. And in lots of things, I do lots of things I'm still very much interested in, I'm as much interested in today than I was, as I was back then. Which is just wonderful.