

*To celebrate International Women's Day on 8th March 2023, the Ridgeway Officer interviewed the two PhD students investigating the Lowbury Lady - Summer Courts and Seongmee Yoon. They share their thoughts on what makes the Lowbury Lady special; what first inspired their interest in archaeology; their female role models, and tips for youngsters interested in a career in archaeology.*



### **Why is it significant that the skeleton found at Lowbury Hill is female?**

Summer: Normally, it's the rich burials – like the Lowbury Man's – that capture the imagination of scholars and locals alike. The Lowbury Lady turns this on its head. The mystery surrounding her has fascinated people for generations, with Donald Atkinson referring to her as the “pièce de resistance” of his Lowbury Hill exhibition. Now, more than a century later the community is coming together to learn more about her life, something which is truly inspiring, considering that she wasn't buried with wealth or weapons and doesn't have an easy-to-establish identity.

Seongmee: The exhibition 'The Mystery of Lowbury Hill' held on 22 October to 24 November 2022 at the Goring Library illustrated the high level of interest in a woman-centered display. There is a discrepancy between the significant public interest in women-centered exhibitions and the limited number of such exhibitions, particularly regarding the Anglo-Saxon and early British Medieval periods. For instance, Lowbury's male skeleton was presented as the highlight of an exhibition about Lowbury Hill archaeology at the Vale and Downland Museum in 1987, 'laid out with his treasures on his breast as described in Beowulf.' The 20th century was a time of male domination, particularly in terms of political and economic power, which resulted in significant barriers for women in areas such as education, employment and political representation. This historical context is reflected in archaeology. Our digital age gives us new opportunities to showcase women's contributions and stories with storytelling software, such as images, videos, and audio.

### **What got you interested in archaeology in the first place?**

Summer: My mother was a collector of historic objects and she would tell me stories based on each object. By the time I realised that someone could pursue a career in

archaeology, which was sometime in my late teens, I was obsessed with the idea. Now I look back over the past decade and a career in archaeology seems inevitable.

Seongmee: As a middle school student, my interest was piqued by the rich histories of civilizations such as Greece and Turkey, which led me to visit those countries. These experiences developed a fascination for archaeology that persists to this day. However, it was during my stay in the United States that I first became truly interested in archaeology. Since then, I have visited numerous museums and galleries, including the National Museum of American History.

### **Which female in history do you admire the most?**

Summer: That's a hard question — if I have to give a single answer, I think I'd go with Tamar the Great, who was ruler of Georgia between 1184 and 1213. Not only was she the first woman to rule Georgia in her own right, she had huge political, military, and cultural success during her reign. Several medieval Georgian sources referred to her as mepe, meaning 'King' and she's still known today as a King of Georgia. I find it particularly inspiring that her memory transcends typical gender roles and has done so for hundreds of years.

Seongmee: Florence Nightingale (1820-1910) was a pioneer in using statistics for medical research and public health. Her activism led to the creation of the first professional nursing school and significant advancements in healthcare and public health practices. She helped elevate nursing to a respected profession for women and provided women with opportunities for education and employment. Her legacy extends beyond healthcare - she supported the women's suffrage movement and this has made her a role model for women around the world.

### **Which female archaeologist do you admire the most?**

Summer: I've most recently been inspired by Kathleen Mary Tyrer Atkinson, née Chrimes. I found out about her through researching her husband, Donald Atkinson. She was an incredible archaeologist working in Greece and Britain and she became the first female professor at Queen's University Belfast. She left a bequest which funds the Roman Society's Donald Atkinson fund upon her death and through her generosity continues to support research into the archaeology of Roman Britain.

Seongmee: I greatly admire Dame Rosemary Jean Cramp who has links to Northumberland where I studied my MA. She was an English archaeologist renowned for her work on the archaeology of Anglo-Saxon churches, monasteries, and Viking settlements in England. Her work illuminates the fundamental role of the early medieval period in shaping European society and culture. She is also significant as the first female professor at Durham University.

### **What would your top tip be to young girls thinking about becoming archaeologists?**

Summer: My top tip to young women considering becoming archaeologists is to be outspoken! Whilst more and more women are becoming archaeologists, the field remains male dominated and it can still be hard for women to make their voices

heard. If you have an idea, put the work in, research it, and once you have enough evidence, make sure everyone hears what you have to say.

Seongmee: My advice is to stay curious and passionate. Don't hesitate to question and explore even the most trivial things, and never stop learning. Remember that the greatest discoveries often start with small questions and require perseverance. Archaeology demands hard work, dedication, and patience, but it can be highly fulfilling. Seek out opportunities to gain experience and knowledge through internships, volunteering, and conferences. Regularly visiting museums and art galleries is a great way to immerse yourself in the richness of different cultures and histories that are essential to the field of archaeology. Archaeology needs diverse perspectives and voices.