



## Young Archaeologists' Clubs in London

Getting and keeping young people involved in archaeology is key to bringing new blood and fresh thinking to the field. Perhaps the most successful initiative of all, Young Archaeologists' Clubs have been meeting the challenge of sparking an interest in school age children for decades. Sarah Dhanjal, Mike Corbishley and Sophie Allen of the UCL Young Archaeologists' Club, review how YACs are faring in the capital.

When YAC@UCL opened in September 2005, it was the third in London, joining branches in Rotherhithe and the Museum of London. Having celebrated our third birthday, we are just beginning to understand the immensity of our commitment.

The Young Archaeologists' Club was set up by Kate Pretty in 1972. It was intended to cater for children aged 9–16 interested in archaeology who, due to the changes in the archaeological profession, could no longer be involved in excavations in the way Pretty and her contemporaries had.

The national club still fulfils those intentions, making a wide range of activities available to children aged 8–16. Many of these activities, like those of the original club, are imaginatively concocted to convey archaeological knowledge and techniques without access to excavation. Our members clamour for the chance to excavate, and occasionally we can arrange this. Apart from the staff at the CBA/YAC headquarters in York, YAC is run by volunteers. They are committed, enthusiastic people who love archaeology and want to communicate that to young people.

**RIGHT: Examining bones in UCL Institute of Archaeology. We are lucky to be based at the Institute, where there are a wide range of resources available to us.**

All photos  
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There are many rewards for becoming a YAC leader. Leaders can use the strong online network for leaders, run by the York HQ, to ask for help and advice. The breadth of experience nationwide on the network is amazing, from teachers and archaeologists to interested parents, students and curators. Branches need at least two or ideally three leaders to start running, with each leader bringing a different perspective and set of skills to the club. Some experience of working with young people and an interest in and enthusiasm for archaeology are the main criteria for volunteers. As well as planning around 11 sessions per year, leaders take responsibility for membership and finances. Leaders can choose to attend training throughout the year, including first aid, ideas for sessions and methods of working with young people. The branch structure also includes assistant leaders and helpers, who can choose how much they are involved, from contributing to sessions or coming to help out on the day.

The challenge of creating sessions that can interest and engage young people who span primary and secondary schools levels is daunting, yet exciting. Every few months we write a programme of monthly events, some based on our members' suggestions, some on our own pet interests. We have had offers of activities and support from the Museum of London, LP Archaeology, the Benjamin Franklin House and countless others. Despite this brilliant work going on year round in London and the support it receives, awareness of YAC seems to be low.

More branches are needed to cover the Greater London area adequately. Huge swathes of London are missing out. We have members who travel across three or four boroughs to get to us. There are plenty of potential funds and members, but adult leaders are in short supply.

There is a growing awareness that the gap between our 16-year-old leavers and the average society membership is quite large. Ongoing discussion centres on how we can keep 16–18 year olds interested in archaeology, until they can take up degrees or join society life actively.

YAC in London is going strong, we have seen a fourth branch open in Harrow in 2008. YAC has a good future ahead of it. What we need are more adults to pass on their interest and enthusiasm to the next generation of London Archaeologists.

To find out more about volunteering with YAC or starting a group, contact the HQ at the Council for British Archaeology:

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**TOP**  
Experimenting with flint knapping with Karl Lee. Our members love trying something for the first time and being able to take a finished piece of work home.

**CENTRE**  
Digging at the UCL training dig in West Dean. YAC members love the chance to experience practical archaeology, but the chances to do so are sometimes quite scarce.



**BOTTOM**  
Finding out about commercial archaeology at the LP Archaeology site in Prescot Street. We were able to compare this with previous experience on a research dig.

