OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGY & TWITTER: INFORMAL OUTREACH

Since starting at Oxford Archaeology almost four years back I (Joseph) have taken on a role different, perhaps, than that of many archaeologists. I work for an IS department now and seem to be concentrating upon communication tools, technologies and systems. I'm quite happy with this; as far as I'm concerned Archaeology is the communication of ideas and as such the discipline would be nothing without dissemination.

What does this have to do with this Day of Archaeology?

Well, I do seem to spend more time dealing with archaeologists rather than archaeology, which is an interesting distinction at times. Having said that, many of the communication technologies I work with aren't the exclusive preserve of Archaeologists. Whilst I have installed a broadband connection to a field in France (and these layer 1-4 activities may form another post later), I thought this post should concentrate on our activities on the Oxford Archaeology Twitter account. Why do we have an account and what do we do with it? I'm not sure I know the answers to those questions, but they might be interesting to think openly about. If nothing else, I can describe what we're doing with it today.

According to our internal forum, I registered @oatweet on July 1st 2010. At the time we'd been asked to brainstorm some concepts for new websites – one for archaeological dissemination [1] and another for commercial clients – and I signed up for the Twitter account thinking we'd use it for something. "Something" was about as far as I was thinking; I supposed it would be good for quick updates that could be syndicated easily, or simply for raising awareness of the fact that we exist and are doing a great deal of interesting work. The websites aren't here yet, but we're getting into Twitter. For a long time, the Twitter feed simply sucked new entries from our Library site and posted them up as links. We're currently undertaking a program of scanning our entire collection of reports and placing them on the Library site; @oatweet let people know how we were getting on.

I was doing the occasional human person tweet, but nothing very exciting; this isn't the way to drum up followers. This was noticed by Hannah, who asked for the password so that she could get involved. Now would be the time to point out that we don't have a Social Media policy here at work – I don't think it's necessary as we have a rough media policy and I believe that different media shouldn't require different policies – and we're not really officially endorsed by- or approved of- Oxford Archaeology. I secretly expect the day that we get shut down from upstairs. Drumming up followers is a policy that's working, however, and between us we're posting more frequently and trying to engage more with our followers.

There are probably ways of measuring your Twitter ROI; traffic sent to your website is something I'm sure plenty of people look into and I'm sure others will rate event attendance or book sales against the Twitter coverage they received. Frankly there's not enough hours in the day and we don't do any of that. If there was a Twitter metric usage we pay slight attention to, it's our number of followers. The thinking is simple; the more followers we have, the more attention

we're bringing to the work of Oxford Archaeology. Twitter's quick and off the cuff style of dissemination is reflected in our treatment of the media.

Still, I've not got on to today's actions: Today, to celebrate #dayofarch and to try and highlight that we release books that are (if I can say this publicly) pretty-ruddy-good, we're giving away the entire Thames Through Time series to one lucky retweeter. As far as archaeological work goes, this is quite a simple process; we write down the names of people that retweet us, they go in a hat and one gets pulled out. I've got a Masters degree and that's the most archaeological I'm getting today; students take note. On Monday I'll be putting three massive hardback books in envelopes and trying to trick someone else into paying the postage for them. Ignore that for now though, as the winner is…

@jadufton

Congratulations to you and big thanks to everyone that entered the competition. As mentioned above, you've helped highlight the fact that we write books and exist on Twitter. For this we are extremely grateful.

[1] Some might call this a Public Archaeology site, but I'm not a big fan of the phrase. I'm a member of the public, after all, so is everyone else that works at Oxford Archaeology. More so, I've never seen any archaeology undertaken by anyone who wasn't also a member of the public.