

# STILL ALIVE

July 29, 2011   Mike Pitts   Archaeological Media, Day of Archaeology, Day of Archaeology 2011, Journalism   Anthropology, Archaeological sub-disciplines, Archaeology, British Archaeology, Charity, Council for British Archaeology, Cultural heritage, designer, Digging Deeper, freelance archaeologist, Next Magazine, printing, retail distributor

This is one of those days that feels wonderful in retrospect, and while it's not over yet I can see things starting to fall into place. I'm a freelance archaeologist who makes a living from writing, broadcasting, taking photos and such like, and I still get the occasional chance to do a bit of research or fieldwork (I suppose technically I'm not freelance anymore, as I work for my own company Digging Deeper, which we set up last year).

For some time now, my biggest single contract has been editing the Council for British Archaeology's magazine British Archaeology. The job definitely has its moments, but overall it's one I love doing, and I'm very proud of what the magazine has become – I really think there is nothing else quite like it, and it's good. But it does take a bit of work, and as people close to me know to their cost, the couple of weeks leading up to printing are, shall I say, tense. In the case of the next issue, that has been the couple of weeks leading up to now.

I've come to realise that unless you've experienced real deadlines, you cannot understand what they mean. When a printer is expecting a magazine by a certain time on a certain day, that is a deadline. If you miss it, you risk messing up something on which thousands of people are depending (for which they have paid good money), and which involves a chain of businesses (van drivers, printers – there's more than one involved in this job – a mailing house, a designer, a retail distributor and so on), all of whom are working to the same timetable. And most of all, of course, in this case it means risking letting down the charity that funds it all, the CBA.

So that means that on every page of the 68 page magazine, every word, every punctuation mark, every image, every line and box, from editorial (which I wrote this afternoon) and adverts (one of which was substituted this afternoon), to book reviews (13 reviewers in this issue, only one of whom is really late... I'll be writing mine imminently) and the major features (seven in this issue, including an exclusive I'm very excited about, though who knows whether anyone will share my enthusiasm?), has to be in the right place, doing the right thing, and looking right, at the right time. And it means that news stories, which are some of the last things I research and write so they are topical and exclusive, have to be right, even if that means allowing everyone involved to have their say, and changing a one-paragraph story 18 times (it happened, in British Archaeology over the past three days).

And the most important thing of all, is that when someone buys the magazine in their newsagent and, perhaps, flicks through it on the train as they go home from work, they should have no idea how much blood was spilt to produce it. All they should see is the excitement of archaeology, the great stories, the

beauty of old things – and, inevitably now, a bit about the difficulties archaeologists are having keeping the past alive.

So today I have, almost, finished British Archaeology number 120 (in the shops on August 12!). Right now, that is as intense a day of archaeology as I ever get. Phew!