

# THE ROW

July 31, 2011 aag\_arch Commercial Archaeology, Day of Archaeology, Day of Archaeology 2011, Post Medieval archaeologist, Burger King, Busking, Dragon, dubious chips, Dumped, extremely dubious chips, farmer, Garbage, garden chair, heavy duty rubber gloves, Homelessness, Humanitarian aid, Jewish cemetery, Larry Zimmerman, laser, Minnesota, plastic garden chair, Queen, Schizophrenia, Scotland, Scran, Socioeconomics, United Kingdom, United States

The Row is a codename we use for one of our sites which may be the oldest provincial Jewish cemetery in the UK, the site has suffered badly from neglect, vandalism and hate attacks and was completely sealed off in the 1950s. Surrounded on all sides by industrial properties and wasteland, and unused since the early nineteenth century the site has turned into a jungle growing on top of an illegal dump. The charity set up to restore the cemetery relies entirely on donations so work has proceeded in fits and starts as and when the company and the charity manage to raise money. Recent successes have included obtaining free 3D laser scanning and polynomial photography for the surviving inscriptions.

Work today involves continuing the never-ending battle against the vegetation and dumped rubbish which has had free reign since Queen Victoria was on the throne and had reached heights of over 8'. One of our first visits to the site involved the sweat-drenched, machete-chopping and plank-battering a corridor through solid vegetation. It was amazing how much heat the mass of plant-life gave out and was indistinguishable from a tropical jungle, although we were on a northern industrial estate. Since then we have removed tons of plant waste and dumped rubbish. One of AAG's major regrets for the site was the missed opportunity regarding the archaeology of garbage and the homeless camp built against one corner of the site, which had recently become abandoned. A 150+ year deposition of illegal dumping would have been a great exercise in garbage archaeology, and the archaeological studies of homeless sites in Minnesota by Larry Zimmerman was one of the most relevant studies of homelessness ever undertaken.

The layers of rubbish continue to turn up increasingly bizarre and nostalgic finds, high hopes for a Millennium Falcon were dashed on closer examination when it turned out to be a 2005-issue Burger King toy. The Goblet of Fire and Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story on VHS are welcome finds and a mint condition plate from the DDR is an unexpected bonus. The site is a harsh one due to the lack of budget, but morale remains high. The gigantic nettles are capable of stinging double-gloved hands through heavy duty rubber gloves and pervasive ivy tripwires floor the unwary. Pain and frustration are released against the larger items of dumped rubbish pulled from the site, which are reduced to fragments and stuffed into rubble bags. The greatest hazard has proved to be the scran van which has disappeared in the last few days, possibly as a result of selling some extremely dubious chips. Few graduate jobs can involve so much physical work, and it always amazes me how much of the archaeologist's day is spent cleaning things up, and doing the farmer's walk while loaded down with tools, spoil, or samples. Moving gravestones and stonework onsite has to be done by hand as the site is like a sloping obstacle course and at certain points of the day resembles a World's Strongest Man final.

As the day ends we climb out and do the best to cover our tracks with whatever materials are lying around, the ruptured bags of household rubbish seem to be the most effective. Recently we have used a fake dog turd and a plastic garden chair with one missing leg stolen to block gaps holes in the site perimeter, both now stolen. Where the three-legged garden chair is now we would love to know, we suspect it is somewhere near a pile of bricks capable of supporting it. We did admire the resolve of whoever took the leap of faith to pick up the fake turd.