

MY PROJECT: “DIG FOR VICTORY”

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I'm Sarah, and I'm a part time archaeology student. As I was on holiday on the actual Day of Archaeology, I've decided to write about a current project of mine entitled “Dig for Victory”.

My situation is a little complicated, but in summary I'm a distance learning student with the Open University but also doing practical courses with the University of Southampton. I'm finishing up my degree at the end of next month and I'll be starting my Masters with Southampton in October. I'm particularly interested in prehistory, specifically human origins, but I'll have to wait until October to join the postgrad world. For now I'm digging around in the dreaded depths of theory.

As a distance learner I'm somewhat limited in my project choices, and therefore cannot run out into the field wielding my trowel very often. Instead I found myself oddly drawn to archaeological theory, and in particular to an assignment I did in my first year about the politics of archaeology. Although I investigated many cases in many different countries, for my project I decided to focus on archaeology in Nazi Germany and wartime Britain. In particular I'm investigating how national identity was in part built by archaeological findings, and how these were used to include and exclude certain groups of people.

In Britain various national icons, such as the British Museum, were used to promote national identity and to unite the country during in between the World Wars. Museums in particular provided an avenue for people to explore their history and develop national pride in their country.

But in Germany it was rather a different story, with archaeology being used to prove ideological arguments and to legitimise the actions of the leaders of the Nazi party. The field of archaeology quickly came under the jurisdiction of the military, as many areas did, and was being used to investigate the “great Germanic people”. At one point excavations were being planned near every SS unit to help instil a sense of national pride. But, of course, excavations were expected to support the ‘right’ version of history, not necessarily the true version. Prehistory in particular was used (despite Hitler allegedly not thinking highly of prehistory) to write the history of the Germanic people, and therefore justify the invasion of other countries.

I've recently been focusing on the German archaeology, and moving onto the British side next week when I visit various museums in London. I never really realised before just how much archaeology was used,

and how archaeology in Germany was littered with references to the military – for example, I've many images of Nazi officers attending the opening of museums and of Nazi banners at conferences.

Although I would, of course, love to be out in the field digging for my project, I'm glad I've had the opportunity to sit and consider theory in more depth. As a first year I was too baffled by theory (as is every archaeology student!) to fully appreciate why it was important, and it wasn't until the final lecture that I really understood why we were learning this stuff!

I think it's important for archaeology students to learn about the history of archaeology itself, and that it's not just about what we dig up but also about the impact that knowledge has on others. Archaeology has gone through many changes in the last century, and is bound to go through many more in years to come.

I've certainly found an invaluable but cautionary tale in my researching, and I hope to share more details with you once I have finished. If you would like to follow me while I complete my research and move onto my Masters, you can follow me on Twitter at: <http://www.twitter.com/archaeosarah>

Thank you for reading, and happy (belated) day of archaeology!