

# A DAY IN THE LIFE OF... A PHD STUDENT!

July 29, 2011 Rachael Day of Archaeology 2011, Iron Age, Prehistory, Romano-British Anthropology, archaeologist, Archaeology, archiving, Birmingham University, Bradford University, Broxmouth, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Humanities, pence, PhD, prehistoric site, Rachael Reader, Scotland, Student, supervisor, Television in the United Kingdom, Time Team, University, York

Hi folks!

There are all kinds of contributors to the day of arch and I feel extremely proud to be one of them. This is just an introduction to me and setting the scene for what I will actually be doing tomorrow. My name is Rachael Reader and I am currently writing up my PhD thesis, hopefully handing in within the next three months. My interest in archaeology began when I was eight (no, really!) when I was introduced to Time Team. It seems a little cliched, but it is the God honest truth! My parents were more than happy to fuel my interest and let me dig up the back garden of my house in a little town, just outside of Barnsley (my best find to date is a 1980s ten pence piece...). My parents found out where digs were happening and took me along to them, including one in York where I learnt the real truth about archaeology. I had an illuminating conversation with someone working in the museum gardens who told me that archaeology was poorly paid, nothing like Time Team and definitely nothing like Indiana Jones (which meant little to me as even to this day, as I have still not seen the films!). I asked the archaeologist why they still did it and they replied simply "because I love it". The enthusiasm he had, even when describing the negatives, sealed it for me and off I went to university to pursue my career. I studied Ancient History and Archaeology at Birmingham University before doing my Masters at Cardiff, where I developed my current research interests in the later prehistoric period and particularly, the landscape approach to archaeology.

Whilst writing my Masters thesis I was pondering over what to do next. I had spent several weeks here and there, excavating with the University but also community digs, including SHARP at Sedgeford in Norfolk. I loved digging but had yet to know how commercial archaeology worked, so I began putting my CV together and waiting for jobs to come up at units. However my supervisor directed me to an advert for a PhD position, at Bradford University and it involved two of my favourite things: Iron Age stuff and landscape! I could not resist and I eagerly put together my application, was offered an interview and ultimately the position, which I was thrilled to accept. I began my current position in October 2008 and I feel a little sad that I am beginning to wind down and \*gulp\* hand in.

The project is known as the Broxmouth Project and has been running since 2008 and is due to finish 2012. The aim of the project is to publish a monograph on the site of Broxmouth hillfort (located just outside of Dunbar, East Lothian), a site which was excavated back in 1978 due to the threat of quarrying. These were the days before PPG16 so it was fantastic that this site was excavated over such a long period of time. Unfortunately, despite the best efforts of the excavator in charge, the site never reached full publication and the amazing archive including Southern Scotland's biggest faunal assemblage from a later prehistoric site, was at risk of never being fully appreciated. However in 2008, Historic Scotland allocated funding to Bradford University to carry out full post-excavation analysis of the site and publish the results. Alongside this, AHRC granted funding for three PhD students to realise the full research potential of the site. I am on an AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award which is a little different to a normal

PhD. Some PhDs are advertised as jobs, like mine was but more often than not, you come up with a research idea and approach the potential supervisor and then set out to obtain funding to pursue your research. The CDA is different as it is attached to not only the university but an external body, in my case, Historic Scotland. This also means that the PhDs also had to carry out a placement with HS, which meant living in Edinburgh for three months and working from Historic Scotland's central office.

I am also not the only CDA student as there are two others working on the project as well. You might think that three of us on the same project would be producing the same thesis and doing the same research but this is far from the truth! We are all working on different aspects of the archive; one on the finds from the site, another on the roundhouses and settlement at the site and I am working on the ditches and the wider landscape setting of the site. One of the initial worries was that working so closely with each other, that we would write similar theses or influence each other too much theoretically but this is far from the case. We listen to each other and know exactly what the other is doing but we can offer our comments and thoughts on potential reading or what we think of each other's work. I think this has been absolutely brilliant for the project and our theses and we get on fantastically.

So what can you expect in the life of a PhD student? Well, I will be posting on some of my thought processes and what I think was going on during the later prehistoric period of south-east Scotland, as well as talking about the environment I work in. I'll talk about the wider context of the project and how archaeology doesn't end when a site is finished being excavated. Analysing a thirty year old archive also gives an insight into the lives of archaeologists thirty years ago (including weather reports and delicious cheesecake recipes!)