

# A FLO'S LIFE

June 29, 2012 Julie Cassidy Community Archaeology, Day of Archaeology 2012, Finds Anthropology, archaeologist, Archaeology, Archive and Heritage Service, Artifact, field walker, Finds Liaison Officer, Geoff Egan, John Prescott, metal detected artefacts, metal detecting, metal detectorists, Northants County Council, Record Office, representative, Social Media, Stephen Fry, Twitter

I have been the Finds Liaison Officer for Northamptonshire since October 2008, and trying to give an account of what it is like to be an FLO, and the challenges, joys and bizarre incidents I have encountered over the last (almost) 4years in a one day diary post is impossible.

I am hosted in Northants County Council by the Archive and Heritage Service. This team includes the HER (Historic Environment Record) and the Record Office, who are generally archivists, and so although I am part of a team which curates and maintains the Historic resources of the county, I am very much alone in what I do. I handle, research and record archaeological artefacts discovered by members of the public. Being the only FLO in what is a relatively small county in the Midlands (when compared to my colleagues in Kent, Essex and the North) has its challenges and rewards like any other job.

Despite meaning to engineer my diary so that I had something interesting to report on for today, my diary is actually relatively quiet compared to other days where I do Finds Surgeries in museums and Council Offices across the county. Finds Surgeries allow members of the public to meet me and bring me artefacts they have discovered, and want me to identify and record for them. 90% of these surgeries are used by metal detectorists, who deliberately search fields with the intention of discovering archaeological artefacts. The majority of whom do their own research and have a good understanding of what they have found, bringing them to me for the purposes of recording them for archaeological knowledge and research, rather than for ID alone. But of that remaining 10% I am often delighted by the range of artefacts discovered accidentally by people digging their garden, or walking across the countryside, and who are genuinely amazed by what they have found. A case in point is PAS database record NARC-894AF2, found by a young lady when digging a rockery in her back garden and whose father very sheepishly brought it in to me at a Finds Surgery in Daventry, hoping he wasn't embarrassing himself by bringing me a rock! In fact what he had brought me was a genuine Acheulian hand axe, dating to the Lower paeleolithic era and adding to our scant knowledge of Palaeolithic Northants. Yes, that was in 2009, so maybe I am cheating by mentioning it here – but it gives you the perfect case in point – you never know what is coming through the door in this job!

In an age when few museums have archaeological curators on staff to advise people on their finds, the FLO in most counties tend to be the first port of call for people with questions about archaeological artefacts and treasure. These questions range from wondering about a date and meaning of Willow pattern pottery in their back garden, to showing me flints found in the garden, driveway or field wondering if they are worked and of importance (very rarely the case, but it isn't impossible and I'd always rather people double checked than didn't try at all!), to large collections of metal detected artefacts from people who have detected for a long period of time and want to record them with the PAS. In between those categories are the metal detectorists who visit me every month to record their previous months finds, and we have a regular turn over of artefacts.

This type of collection is one which I am working my way through now. It has a range of pottery, Roman coins, medieval pennies and some post-medieval finds which I will not record but will offer the finder an ID for them by writing on the bag ("Georian fob" and the like). Each object is in a bag with the findspot location written on it, which is ideal. This collection is a accurate representation of the general finds from most fields. People get very excited over Treasure cases, and the discovery of a treasure case is sometimes the only press metal detecting and PAS gets. The reality is much less headline grabbing, but much more archaeologically significant.

After I have battled my way through that small collection, I have these large boxes of pottery to wade through from a field walker in Geddington which will probably, for the sake of time and my sanity, end up as a bulk report for the HER rather than an individual record for each sherd on the PAS database.



*Fieldwalkers  
pottery  
collection*

After that, I have approximately 25 emails to reply to, mostly from people wanting to know where to meet me so I can see their objects, or wanting to know how I am getting on with their objects and when can they have them back (I try for a 2 month turn around, but the more finds that come in, the harder this self-imposed deadline gets).

Then will be preparation for Monday's Finds Research Group (FRG) meeting. I was asked to be on the FRG committee as a representative of the Post-Medieval period by the late, great Geoff Egan, who is still sorely missed. Post-Med to modern finds are often disregarded by archaeologists, and by my work with the FRG and Post-Med Arch I am trying to increase the realisation among the archaeological community that they are a valuable resource which will be lost to future generations if we don't stop disregarding them now. I hope I can do Geoff proud on this!

It would be remiss of me to mention what I do in a day without mentioning the time I spend on Twitter, which in some jobs would be labelled as time wasting! But as an archaeologist – in addition to finding out all about what Stephen Fry and John Prescott are up to on a daily basis during my coffee breaks – I have found it a massively valuable resource in finding out about research projects and exhibitions which I would have no idea about otherwise. Social media is here to stay and should be used as a resource by everyone to communicate events and ideas. And judging by the really interesting post already up there from #dayofarch, many people are coming around to that.