

PHIL JEFFRIES (MOLA): A HYBRID JOB IS NEVER BORING

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I hold a hybrid job role within MOLA, being both an Archivist and a Senior Archaeologist for watching briefs. Combined, these provide me with a variety of different tasks and settings in which to spend my working days.

Within the MOLA Archive team I am principally responsible for preparing all the finds and finds records from sites, in readiness for their deposition into the relevant accepting public repository. Much of the material I handle relates to excavations from within Greater London and therefore is ultimately to be deposited into The London Archaeological Archive and Resource Centre (LAARC) run by The Museum of London, which has its own standards to which the prepared material must conform.

Whilst having several small – medium sized finds projects currently on the go, I am also overseeing a long term finds archive project which has been opened up for the public to get involved with. This volunteering opportunity is concerned with preparing all the finds material from the excavation of the Guildhall Yard in the City of London during 1992-1997 (Site Code GYE92).

GYE92 is perhaps the largest finds archive to be prepared by MOLA and also one of the largest ever to be received (eventually) by LAARC. To give you an idea of the scale of the project, there are some 2339 boxes of finds/environmental remains stored on 157 shelves across three bays of the building we occupy, plus larger objects yet to be discovered off site. There are over 20,500 Accessioned Finds, some of which are on display in the Guildhall and others already noted as missing in action. In order that the material is archive worthy, the finds must be packaged and labelled according to LAARC's standards and these must then run in numerical sequence within

boxes of material type. The boxes are then stored in material and numerical sequence on the shelves. All the finds must be checked against and systematically logged onto the finds or environmental inventory spreadsheets which have an initial combined cell count of over half a million cells. Where appropriate, errors, omissions, additions and amendments noted must also be updated on MOLA's primary Oracle database and a running Archivist's Note of un-resolvable errors/omissions kept to accompany the final archive deposit.



Phil in Archive-mode, checking finds data tables

We currently have a pool of 6 members of the public volunteering on the project two days per week and for the last few months they have been processing the bulk animal bone from the site, (all 924 boxes of it)! Typically the volunteers can come in and once settled, get on with the day's tasks with minimal direction, however I'm on call to assist with queries as and when they arise.

This might be concerned with relocating non-bone material that has incorrectly made its way into the animal bone boxes or resolving discrepancies with context numbering or packaging policies. The information that the volunteers collate is then updated onto the final Excel finds inventory which is growing by the day as new discoveries not captured on the original database are brought to light during re-packaging.

Whilst not preparing finds or chasing up their present whereabouts in a building the size of an aircraft hanger or overseeing the volunteers, I might well be involved with other archive duties such as checking field records or converting digital files into archive storable versions.

Alternatively, I may be dealing with one of the fieldwork watching brief projects I have been assigned to look after in the capacity of a Senior Archaeologist within the Field Team. Two of these projects are what can be described as long term and intermittent in nature and involve me monitoring certain key ground works on infrastructure projects that span several years. A watching brief is usually undertaken on sites where the proposed construction works do not require an archaeological excavation to be conducted or follow on from earlier evaluation trenching or archaeological excavations close by and are usually undertaken by one attendant experienced Field archaeologist.



Phil with his Archaeologist Hat on now (c) MOLA 2013

The job essentially requires a high degree of observation under less than ideal circumstances, where a few minutes may be all the time permitted to make quick records of archaeological features and natural strata as they are removed by the machines at work. My projects require me to remotely monitor complex construction schedules via phone and email with lead engineers on the sites and organise myself to be on site when the latest sequence of excavations for new foundations, utility trenches, shafts or general ground reduction is due to begin. The sites I visit are varied and fall in numerous London boroughs, from public spaces such as the streets of The West End and central London parks to industrial sites of former power stations or basements of residential and commercial properties. Generally, schedules rarely stay on track and an anticipated site visit might be put back on the proposed day as problems arise with anything from a break down of a machine to discovery of asbestos or particularly reinforced concrete. In this case I have to be pretty flexible with my diary and be accommodating to working on several separate pieces of indoor archive work which will ultimately be interrupted. As well as actually creating the primary field records during my on site monitoring, I am also responsible for producing reports based on these observations, this brings me into contact with several other departments such as the Drawing Office, Photography Studio and Geomatics/Survey team. All in all it's rare that I get two successive days that might be described as repetitive!