

A LIFE IN A DAY

July 12, 2014 Arwen James Buildings, Community Archaeology, Day of Archaeology 2014, Experimental Archaeology, Finds, Neolithic, Public Archaeology Ancient Technology Centre, British Museum, Community Archaeology, Daub, East Oxford Project, English Heritage, experimental archaeology, Finds, Hampton Court Palace, metal detectorists, Natural History Museum Oxford, Neolithic, Neolithic House Interpreter, Photographing, Portable Antiquities Scheme, Stonehenge, Winchester Museums Service

Last year I quit my job in the city, moved back home, and made the decision to move back into archaeology. It was a very difficult decision to make as I had to give up the life I was used to in London, but I feel it was the right one. I'm very passionate about community archaeology, and I believe it is important for people to be aware of the landscape and history around them as this helps to increase the understanding of their heritage and identity. I also believe that so many skills can be gained through participation, both practical and personal.

When I first left my job I was so nervous I'd be unable to find any volunteer roles, and I'd be sitting around not working at all. How wrong I was! I've been very lucky to be involved in a range of amazing projects and the experience I've gained has been invaluable.

As my main interest is community archaeology I tried to focus on getting experience in that, both in how community archaeology works behind the scenes, and general experience of working with the public. I've been involved in a range of projects over the last few months. Rather than focus on one day, I'm going to give an overview of each of them, along with a link to their websites so you can find out more.

The first place I got involved in at the beginning of the year was the Portable Antiquities Scheme. My nearest branch is in Winchester, with the Winchester Museums Service. I had experience working with finds on excavations, but I rarely got to see anything other than pottery and animal bones, so the experience has been so important. The scheme is a funded project to record archaeological objects found by members of the public in England and Wales. Most of the finds are bought in by metal detectorists, but not all. It has been really successful in encouraging good practice in finders and land owners, and many finds have been recorded on the database, including the location of where they were found. I am one of the many volunteers round the country who help to photograph and record these finds. I feel very fortunate to be able to handle these items, and learn more about them.



Photographing worked flint



Editing the image on the computer, ready to put on the database

As well as recording items, I've also been on training courses during my time with the PAS. I've had a day course on Roman coins at the British Museum, and a really interesting session on Roman brooches, and the different types. The Portable Antiquities Website is: <http://finds.org.uk>

I then got involved at Stonehenge, signing up to be a Neolithic House Interpreter. I took all the training, and then the opportunity came up to work on building the houses too. It was a fantastic experience, as it really gave me insight into how these buildings could have been built originally and the range of materials available. It was great to look at the archaeological evidence from Durrington Walls, and really think about how these buildings were first built, and how they were used. I also really enjoyed daubing, using a mixture of chalk, water and straw to cover the walls, it's very therapeutic! The houses were built under the guidance of the Ancient Technology Centre, more information can be found here – <http://www.ancienttechnologycentre.co.uk>



Putting the daub onto one of the Neolithic Houses

The volunteers have also received training on fire training (very important in a house made of wood and straw!), bread making, flint knapping, and clothing and organic materials. This is so beneficial and has really helped when speaking to visitors onsite.





As the houses only opened at the beginning of June, I've only done a few sessions as a house interpreter, but the knowledge gained on the building of the houses has really benefited. I feel I can really explain to the public about how the houses were created. I'm also very proud of the houses and the team that worked on them, they are beautiful structures. More information can be found on the Neolithic Houses blog – <http://neolithichouses.wordpress.com>



These are the two main projects I've been involved in, but I've also had the odd day here and there. I helped to survey the roof of Hampton Court Palace, which was a bit scary balancing on the wooden

beams! I've also done some work with the East Oxford Project helping to sort finds from test pits, and attending a really interesting [pottery weekend run by Paul Blinkhorn](#). I additionally spent a day in the Natural History Museum in Oxford moving small mammal skulls, and repacking them into more suitable containers!



Balancing on a beam in the dark Hampton Court attic!

So, although I'd absolutely love a proper paid secure job (it's exhausting fitting in the babysitting and gardening!) I feel very privileged to be involved in all these projects, which is why I wanted to write about all of them. There is such a range of work going on around the country, and it's very exciting.

