

IN SOME CORNERS OF ENGLAND....

July 12, 2014 Kevin Wooldridge Day of Archaeology 2014, Digital Archaeology, Excavation, Historical Archaeology, Military digital archaeological recording systems, digital recording systems, English Heritage, Portsmouth, Royal Navy, Stonehenge, UK Heritage Lottery Fund, Wiltshire

An important thing needs to be said on this Day of Archaeology.... Archaeology means many things to many people. Its birth and life-blood lie in an area of the world currently riven by conflict. As I write there is news that monuments are being destroyed in Syria and Iraq and once again bombs are falling on Gaza. More than just damage to sites, innocent people are dying...there is no justification for this. I fervently hope that at least the international community of archaeologists, of all creeds, race and nationality can work peacefully together, recognising and celebrating our common humanity.



Bombs falling on Gaza

In previous years I have been away for the 'Day of Archaeology' – Bulgaria in 2012 and Norway last year. But for most of this year so far, I have been in the UK working for English Heritage....and lots of interesting things have been happening as well. So this time round I want to mention some of the archaeological avenues and alleyways I have recently travelled

Firstly I presented my Masters dissertation back in January. It seemed to be a long time in the planning but relatively brief in the time it took to actually write and illustrate. It will be a Christmas and New Year that I will never get back, but overall fairly painless. My theme was the use of GIS as a primary recording tool in archaeology.

Student ID Number

1213782

Name or title of Assessment Piece

Towards a seamless flow of information: The application of GIS as a primary data collection tool in field archaeology.

Module Name

MA Dissertation

Module Number

09 20346

Programme title

MA Landscape Archaeology, GIS & Virtual Environments

Date of Submission

29th January 2014

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The main thrust of my thesis was a discussion of the use of digital archaeological recording systems, in particular the ***Intrasis*** programme developed by the Swedish Antiquities board. The system is used widely in Scandinavia and by English Heritage in the UK. I used some examples from recent field work I have carried out, to compare and contrast digital data collection with more traditional (and largely) analogue practices. I also looked at some of the reasons given by archaeological professionals who expressed resistance to adopting digital methods. Basically my conclusions were that we should wholly embrace digital methods, but that there is no reason to throw the baby out with the bath water. Analogue methods are tried and tested and in some circumstances more practical in both application and efficiency. Archaeology should embrace the best of both methodologies.



Use of traditional and digital recording methods

Fortunately my examiners deemed it sufficient. (I should add that other digital recording systems are available, but none that are as well advanced and practiced as ***Intrasis***).

The first part of my English Heritage year was spent writing a publication draft for an intended monograph on archaeological work carried out at Chiswick House, London over the past 30 years.



Chiswick House London

This was an interesting project trying to tie together a lot of different projects by a number of different archaeological contractors (not just English Heritage). The publication follows a programme of archaeological excavations in 2008 and 2009, undertaken as part of the Chiswick House and Grounds regeneration scheme, a project funded by the UK Heritage Lottery Fund. The publication project will hopefully come to a successful end in 2015...for now my work is largely completed.

The opportunity to work for English Heritage means I am nominally based at Fort Cumberland in Portsmouth, a late 18th defensive fort guarding the mouth of the Solent and the Royal Navy dockyard at Portsmouth.



English Heritage offices at Fort Cumberland Portsmouth

The archaeology departments of English Heritage and its predecessor organisations have been based here since the 1970s. Weekends give me the chance to explore some of my earliest memories of Portsmouth (I lived here as a child) and also to follow the up and down progress of my favourite soccer team (Portsmouth FC or Pompey). Fort Cumberland is a huge site only fragments of which are in use by the English Heritage archaeology team. Occasionally bits fall off the old buildings and occasionally older parts of the site are uncovered.....



A recently uncovered 19th century gun emplacement on the outer edge of Fort Cumberland

In March I had the opportunity to get out of the office and do a bit of field work with an English Heritage team at Whitby Abbey in North Yorkshire. Archaeological work has been ongoing on at Whitby for most of the last 3 decades and this small excavation led by Tony Willmott was intended to answer a few questions that earlier works had thrown up. In particular the uncovering of a stone founded structure in the middle of the Anglian cemetery, that may be the remains of an early chapel.



Stone founded structure in the middle of the Anglian cemetery, Whitby

.....Whitby is a very evocative site, especially in the fog..



Whitby Abbey in a sea fog

There has been some speculation in recent months in both the archaeological and UK national press as to whether there are enough professional archaeologists currently available to meet the challenge of imminent superstructure projects (the HS2 rail link in particular). At Whitby we bucked the trend completely in that regard, where the accumulated archaeological experience of our 10 person crew exceeded 300 years!! And I wasn't even in the top 5 !!



Several centuries of archaeological experience in a single trench at Whitby



The famous English Heritage site teapot...if enamel could talk that teapot could tell a tale or tw

Virtually straight after Whitby I was back in the field on another EH project, this time in West Wiltshire. This was part of the National Archaeological Identification Survey (NAIS), a project where we were undertaking archaeological evaluation on features recognised by aerial photography and map survey.



West Wilts archaeology

I won't go into detail about this project as its results are still being analysed, (My Day of Archaeology work is looking at records from the excavations right now)... other than to say that it gave the opportunity to look at the number of different period and type sites to the west of Salisbury Plain. It has been intensive but interesting work. It clearly got all too much for one digger who admitted that he had dreamt I was assaulting him with a wheelbarrow, something that would be highly unlikely to happen in real life....



What do archaeologists dream about? Wheelbarrows as instruments of abuse apparently....

...Being out in Wiltshire for the past 10 weeks gave me the opportunity to wear another EH hat and act as a steward for the summer Solstice celebration at Stonehenge. English Heritage allow free access to the stones over the night of the Solstice and within reason folk are able to pretty do as they wish providing of course that it doesn't affect the monument or its setting.



Celebrating the solstice Stonehenge, June 2014

It was great fun and I recommend it to anyone (Not least as it saves you the cost of an extremely expensive entry ticket to Stonehenge)....

...who knows where next years blog will come from. I am returning to Wiltshire in a couple of weeks to assist on a university field school, but after that....?

