

DEIRDRE KELLEHER – A DAY OF ARCHAEOLOGY, 2014

July 19, 2014 Philadelphia Archaeological Forum Community Archaeology, Day of Archaeology
2014, Finds Elfreth's Alley Association, Philadelphia, Temple University Anthropology
Lab, www.elfrethsalleyarchaeology.blogspot.com



Today (Thursday, July 10, 2014) I hosted a public archaeology lab day at Temple University's Anthropology Laboratory. During the day we cleaned artifacts recovered from archaeological investigations behind 124 and 126 Elfreth's Alley, which house the museum and gift shop of the Elfreth's Alley Association. The Alley, which is located in Old City Philadelphia, is a National Historic Landmark District and is credited with being the oldest continuously-occupied residential street in the United States. The street was formed circa 1702 as a cartway to connect Front Street along the Delaware River to the commerce on Second Street.

Throughout the day, I set-up, assisted, and oversaw volunteers as they wet washed and dry-brushed artifacts from excavation unit 14. Unit 14 was excavated in the small courtyard behind 124 and 126 Elfreth's Alley during the summer of 2013. Today volunteers diligently used toothbrushes to gently remove dirt from the objects, revealing previously hidden details of the artifacts such as a hand-painted floral design on a sherd of creamware ceramic or a molded letter visible on a piece of clear vessel glass. Once the objects were cleaned, they were placed on screens to let them dry before being cataloged. As volunteers cleaned, I also put cleaned artifacts into new storage containers.

As always, the volunteers today were amazing to work with! As they washed artifacts and discussed the street's past, they actively took part in the discovery and formation of the small street's history. While Elfreth's Alley Archaeology volunteers often come from various backgrounds (today alone volunteers included a professional photographer, a math professor, a stay at home parent, and recent college

graduates), they all share a passion and love of history. I asked the volunteers to share their thoughts, impressions, and experiences from today. Below is what they had to say:



“This was my first time processing artifacts. I felt like I was touching history.” – Leanna

“I am a repeat customer. I am interested in discover/interpreting the story of another time.” – Jill

“I got involved in [the] Elfreth’s Alley Archaeology project and in interpretation by hearing stories of settlement and survival. Handling artifacts, wet washing/dry brushing, gives me direct context to a place.”
– Amanda

“[I] found a very black piece of bone and a mostly intact tooth.” – Andrew

“I really enjoyed my first time processing artifacts. My favorite part was washing the dirt off the ceramic pieces and waiting for the pop of color to show up. It was like taking a trip back in time.” –Livia

“Today, I mostly dry-brushed metal objects. There were several nails, all shapes and sizes. I enjoyed trying to imagine the structures these nails once held together, structures that have since been swallowed by time.” – Wendy

Each of these fantastic volunteers has become part of the Alley’s history themselves!

Later in the day, I was also on a conference call with the Chemical Heritage Foundation (CHF) and archaeologist Douglas Mooney of URS Corporation regarding the planning and recording of an upcoming podcast on urban archaeology in Philadelphia for CHF's Distillations program.

Related Websites:

Archaeology on the Alley Blog (www.elfrethsalleyarchaeology.blogspot.com)

Elfreth's Alley Website (www.elfrethsalley.org)

CHF Distillations Podcast (www.chemheritage.org/discover/media/distillations)

Temple University Anthropology Lab (www.temple.edu/anthro/laboratory_museum)