

# YOU CALL \*THIS\* ARCHAEOLOGY?!

July 24, 2015 Matt Knight Experimental Archaeology, Explore Posts, Finds Archaeology, Day of Archaeology, PhD

The scene is one I'm sure many of you have watched a hundred times: Indiana Jones punches a Nazi off a tank and Henry Jones Sr (aka the magnificent Sean Connery) pops his head up and exclaims "So, you call this archaeology?" Archaeology is of course a great many things, but punching bad guys off war machines is not one them (or at least I've never been involved in anything like that!)

Regardless, this scene, and the Indiana Jones films in general, forms one of my favourite cinematic moments for its brilliantly ludicrous nature and unashamedly ironic humour. Last week I presented it to a group of Year 12s I was teaching to exemplify how Hollywood tries to glamorise and manipulate "archaeology" into palatable cinematography. Indiana Jones was by no means the first, and was certainly not the last, to do this, and whilst what I do day-to-day is almost certainly not thrilling enough for Steven Spielberg, archaeology must surely be one of the more engaging and varied subjects out there and holds our interest as a connection with our past.

The Day of Archaeology (i.e. today!) celebrates the variety of my profession and is meant to be a medium for me to offer an insight to all you lovely readers into my daily archaeological life (on a side note, that's actually the point of [my entire blog!](#)) Unfortunately, if I charted my routine for Friday 24<sup>th</sup> July 2015, it would inevitably begin at 8:30am with a picture of me reading and typing at my desk with a mug of tea and a full lunch box, and end at 5pm with a picture of me reading and typing at my desk with three mugs of tea and an empty lunch box. It's sad but it is true.

I'm pleased to say I don't spend every day like this though. "Why yes", I hear you say, "you of course must spend some time digging". I am under no pretences that when I tell people I study archaeology, the immediate vision that forms in their heads is of me in a field on my hands and knees starring in a Time Team-esque scene finding something glamorous and newsworthy in only three days. Ironically enough, I actually hardly ever do that.



*But it's been known to happen (Author's photo)*

So what is it I actually do then?! My main task, in fact the main objective of my PhD, revolves around studying and **interpreting objects in museums**, and my mugs of tea and empty lunch boxes are all casualties of my intellectual pursuit to actually do this well enough to have my opinions respected (or at least tolerated!) Museums are overflowing with material, the majority of which is never presented to the public, and I travel around with my bag of important archaeological equipment (ok it's essentially a pair of calipers, kitchen weighing scales and a camera in a H&M bag) studying relevant artefacts, offering my thoughts, and utilising what I've learnt to present this information to other academics in the form of a long tedious text that even I will probably never read in full. This is just one element of what I do and love though.



*Check out the concentration (Author's photo)*

Increasingly over the last few months I've been taking time away from the screens and museums in order to get my hands dirty with Experimental Archaeology (which is essentially the study and replication of prehistoric activities), whether this entails **chiselling stone**, **hitting swords with rocks**, **smelting ores into metal**, sewing bellows, starting fires, dressing up, sleeping in roundhouses... This is a relatively new passion of mine that continually grows and many of my friends and family I've spoken to definitely would never regard this as "archaeology". I'm fortunate to have these opportunities and they definitely add some excitement to my PhD that people can relate to.





*See me doing some important PhD research by smashing sword replicas with a hammer  
(Author's photo)*

More and more my daily routine incorporates some form of teaching or passing on my growing knowledge and personally I think that's perhaps the most important part of what I do at the moment. There's no point learning all this stuff if I'm not passing it on to others. One of my friends recently told me that having read about my recent trip to Butser Farm his new favourite word is "Archaeometallurgy", and whilst I doubt he could now explain to people what it is, it's great that he's at least remembered that there's more to archaeology that meets the eye! Besides, I love doing it – students are generally a pleasure to teach and in many ways it's as challenging to have them grill me on my subject as it is to have academics do it.



*Plus it gives me legitimate opportunity to engage in ridiculous antics (Author's photo)*

So no, I don't have a fedora, whip, and mythical artefacts (sadly), and no, I don't have "just three days to do it". What I do have is a trusty laptop, a library of resources, many museums of objects, and three years to get my PhD done, and right now I'm having more fun than I've ever had by studying a subject that is increasingly challenging and diverse on a day-by-day basis, even if it isn't what Henry Jones Sr might consider "archaeology".