

HERITAGE AS FUTURE MAKING PRACTICE

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One of the things I love about my career in archaeology is that it keeps changing. I love learning new things, that's the discovery hit that so many archaeologists thrive on. While archaeology has a strong culture of expertise, of knowing as much as possible about a tightly defined subject, it also revels in connections between those subjects. So there's room for people like me who love the new.

My new job this year is as a Post-doctoral research associate on the Assembling Alternative Futures for Heritage project, more commonly called [Heritage Futures](#). I once read an undergraduate essay that began "Archaeology definitely deals with the past" and that may be true, but heritage is intimately concerned with the future. Many archaeologists are committed to the project of 'saving the past for the future'. What is this future like? Why do we care about it? How do we contribute to it? My new role is to help answer these kinds of questions.

Luckily I don't have to do this all by myself. Heritage Futures is a four year project with teams at four different universities, all dealing with different aspects of the topic and all comparing heritage practices of future-making with those of other disciplines. My own work is concerned with [deep futures](#) and I'm comparing practices of World Heritage with nuclear waste management and messages sent to deep space. My fieldwork is in the Lake District.

As you may imagine, there's a fair amount of reading and thinking involved in the work and getting up to speed in future studies, nuclear waste management and space communication is no mean feat. But this summer I am also planning my fieldwork for the autumn. As the project is a heritage project, much of my work will involve ethnographic approaches working with people building futures in the Lake District, shepherds, B&B owners, heritage managers, distillers and more.

But since I'm an archaeologist I'm also interested in what material traces of these futures exist in the landscape today. Water, stone, soil, and plant life all hold futures in different ways. The future of this tree is mismatched with the future of this street furniture.



If the topic didn't provide me with enough challenge, we've also committed to using film making practice in our research. Film making is an entirely new skill for me and I was really excited to join the rest of the project researchers in an intensive course organised by our Creative Fellow Antony Lyons and run by Nathan Hughes of [Rough Glory films](#). In addition to teaching us basic camera, audio and editing skills, they encouraged us to think critically about how films construct understanding. A process much more akin to archaeology than I had realised.

One of the things they impressed upon us is that fumbling with your equipment doesn't make for good interviews. So I'm keen to practice though the summer so that I come across professionally when I get into my fieldwork this autumn.

With that in mind I took the opportunity to film at [Thingvellir](#) when I was transferring through Iceland earlier this summer. A World Heritage site on the intercontinental plate boundary, the world's oldest functioning parliament where new land is appearing every year, Thingvellir feels like a great example of future heritage to me.



So I'm spending the Day of Archaeology editing that footage, using different editing and audio styles to see what kinds of different arguments I can make in this new (to me) medium. I'll post what I get when I'm done, rough and ready as it will be.