

BONES, THE BARD, AND PLENTY OF POTS

July 24, 2015 Rob Hedge Archives, Commercial Archaeology, Community Archaeology, Explore Posts, Finds, Medieval, Post Medieval, Public Archaeology Cemetery, Finds, medieval, osteology, pubarch, Shakespeare, Stratford, Victorian, Worcester

I opened my office door this morning to see a roomful of skeletons.

My name's Rob Hedge, I'm a Community Project Officer for [Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service](#). Part of my time is spent helping people find out more about their local heritage and why it matters, from building mock-dig sandpits to standing in the High Street trying to get passers-by enthused about Worcester's medieval pots. I also work in the Finds team, where I'm responsible for overseeing the processing of artefacts once they come in from site, and for analysing some of the small assemblages of finds.

So, the skeletons... we've been excavating an area of the churchyard attached to Holy Trinity, Stratford – famous as the Church where Shakespeare is buried (though they keep him safe from the likes of us in a tomb within the church). And yes, before you ask, the “*Alas, poor Yorrick*” joke has been done to death, by virtually every visitor to the site. An extension to the church is planned, and so we're carefully recording and excavating almost 200 burials spanning at least 600 years which will be disturbed by building work. After analysis, they'll be re-buried on site. It's a densely-packed cemetery and time is tight, so I've been down recently to help with the site work. Personally, I don't particularly enjoy excavating cemeteries, but it's a necessary evil – if we didn't excavate them, they'd be destroyed by construction work. We work hard to keep disturbance to a minimum, but sometimes it's unavoidable.

And the inevitable consequence is bags of bones, each individual careful and separately labelled up. Soon, they'll be taken down to our friends at [Ossafreelance](#), who'll carry out the analysis. But for now, they need somewhere cool and dry. I make a note of what's come in, separate out the finds and samples, load the skeletons onto a trolley and wheel them into our store, trying to avoid mental puns about skeletons and closets...

Assessments next: first, a small assemblage of finds from an infilled Lime Kiln. A nice selection of late 19th/early 20th century domestic items: stone china, stoneware bottles, pot of 'Cherry Tooth Paste' (I'm almost tempted to test the dark red residue clinging to the lid of the pot...) and a near-complete tea-cup made by T & R Boote in Burslem, Staffs around the turn of the 20th century, with this gorgeous stamp showing a steamship, flags fluttering and furnaces firing:



Semi-porcelain cup, T & R Boote, Burslem

The finds tell us that this Lime Kiln probably fell out of use by the late 19th century, and was probably backfilled shortly afterwards. Our palynologist Dr Suzi Richer walks in, and looks bewildered to find me weighing a brick. It was a very nice brick, honest...

Next, to talk through progress and answer correspondence for a project we're doing for Historic England; we're trying to assess the amount and potential value of archaeology and local history research produced by societies, community groups and associations. We know there's a lot of it, and we suspect the full potential of this work to enhance local Historic Environment Records and Research Frameworks isn't being realised. If you're involved in voluntary-sector research, please take a look at [the project and take our survey](#). It's been fascinating to see the responses coming in, and to hear about so many interesting projects, challenges, successes and frustrations. There are some interesting trends emerging... keep an eye out for the report later this year.



Microscope? Check. Scales? Check. Finds? Check. Tea? Check. Doughnuts? Well, it is Friday...

Back to the finds, and onto artefacts from a watching brief on a scheduled ancient monument, a medieval moated manor in north Worcestershire. High-quality post-medieval domestic pottery from a well-to-do household, including early English porcelain, and the base of a lovely medieval jug with splashes of yellow glaze. But my eye is drawn to a chunk of coarse tile, orange surfaces, grey core, with a neat square tapering hole pierced through: a medieval roof tile. Hooked over the roof lath with a simple peg, these tiles were produced in the area from the 13th century onwards; though not much to look at, they had one big advantage over thatch: they didn't burn! There's more on Worcester's medieval fire-proofing measures over on our [Dig Lich Street](#) blog.



Medieval Roof Tile, showing peg-hole and sandy, grey core

Finally, as the Field Staff roll back in, drop off the day's finds, moan about the weather and steal my doughnuts, I make final preparations for tomorrow's exhibition of finds from Worcester Cathedral Roundabout. If you're in Worcester, drop in and see us at [Tudor House Museum](#). I'll be there 10 til 4, trying my best to bring the finds to life!