

# PACIFIC ARCHAEOLOGIES

July 25, 2015    Angela Piccini    Archaeological Media, Archives, Explore Posts, Historical Archaeology, Landscape Archaeology    archives, Canada, memory, seaside archaeology

In my last Day of Archaeology posting, I seemed to spend a lot of time waxing lyrical about the rhythms of academic administration.

This year has involved personal introspection, unexpected auto-archaeology and thinking about the various ways in which, yes, I still count as an archaeologist.

Today, for a number of reasons, I decided to stack work activities into the early morning and to meet friends – a former MA in Archaeology for Screen Media student and a Geographer – in a municipality of Metro Vancouver called White Rock. One of the benefits of being a knowledge worker is that wherever my laptop rests, I can work. So, I can be just as productive in my University of Bristol job working from a formica table in Vancouver as I can be from my university desk. Before we went to White Rock, I found this film for us to watch, to remind us of the halcyon days of the seaside resort. I wonder if the woman in the orange coat, third from the left, is my mother:

<https://youtu.be/0-s1jp6AkGg>

My friend spent her teen years in White Rock. I frequently visited, from the time I was very small with both of my parents through to visiting my father, when he owned a Spanish rancher styled home in the area, complete with stalactite plaster ceiling plaster, circular living room, gold-veined mirrored bar and a stunning collection of louche lamps, the kind with the nude girl in the middle, surrounded by dripping oil threads. This particular domestic collection was troubling, and didn't sit easily with my idea of 'normal' families. It was an interesting material performance alongside the archival records of my father: an Italian from post-war Friuli who, in 1956, stepped off the *Saturnia* at the Pier 21 immigration processing building in Halifax (cf. Monteyne 2015); who quickly gave up his Italian citizenship; who worked his entire life (apart from a few years laying railroad ties and in the pulp and paper mill) as a waiter in cocktail bars, including the infamous Inquisition; who has managed somehow not to gain a criminal record, despite stop-and-search police harassment in the '50s and a healthy interest in running bootleg grappa from the Okanagan; who has a very full medical paper trail despite his rude health at 80. All that is to say that I have a personal connection to this place and I continue to try to think through how archaeology differs from history.

So I arrived on the 351 White Rock Centre bus at 12.30pm. I'd caught the bus at Bridgeport Skytrain Station in Richmond, having travelled from Cambie and Broadway on the Canada Line, the newest transit line, constructed for the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympic Games. While the discourse may focus on 'Super Natural' Vancouver, if you look you see not a city of glass, but a city of concrete. Lots and lots of concrete. A civic love affair that links to Italian immigration, a resource-based economy and shady property market, to which Rudyard Kipling fell victim, writing about it in *From Sea to Sea* (1899). I'd not been to White Rock in years. Outside the first thrift shop I passed on my way down to the pier I saw the pram.



*1967 Lewis Collin pram*

I instantly knew it, having spent important years in it as a baby and more memorable time as a young child with my best friend Carmen playing 'family' with the bassinet section. I think I always made Carmen be the dad and I was either the baby or Carmen's wife. Encountering this pram for the first time in over 40 years, I was immediately struck by its familiarity. I knew how the brakes worked and how to detach the bassinet from the frame. And I was hit by an odd yearning when I saw how the backrest was set. I could feel the textured pattern of the vinyl interior covering. Although it's highly unlikely, I immediately projected my past into this pram, imagining that yes, really, this was mine. That it was infused with my baby oil and my mother's cigarette smoke. The paper tag on the main handle, proudly proclaiming that the pram was '48 years old!' added to its magic. Manufactured in 1967 and I was born in Spring 1968. And it was a very rainy day filled with odd events and so, according to the laws of correlation and serendipity that rule some archaeologists' lives (despite invocations of empiricism), I decided that it might as well have been my pram.

In this choice, based on feeling and desire rather than fact, I was then oriented quite carefully to the built environment through which I walked to access the pier.



*White Rock Pier*

They say that the big rock was white with guano in the past. Today, it is kept white through regular applications of (Cloverdale?) paint. On a grey day like today, I could be at Clevedon, near Bristol, UK or near any British seaside resort. The innocuous pier, colonial imposition on the waters and territory of the Semiahmoo First Nation. And I wonder if what gives away my lingering archaeological disposition is my wondering about the make and make-up of the paint on the rock (and how many layers?); the different states of wood rot along the pier; the changes in the tarmac as 16th Avenue descends from White Rock Centre to the sea; the few remaining early 20th-century beach houses; the locating of the White Rock Archives on the beach front; and the lines of train track, road, hedging, street furniture and how they organise movement.

And these meanderings do not constitute a rigorous archaeology, but they help me to think about the other projects I'm involved in that do constitute my professional work. My Day of Archaeology helped me to think again about the [Know your Bristol on the Move](#) project, which links film and photographic archives to place via a participatory mapping interface. It helped me to reflect on the work that some of us have been doing to contribute archaeological methods and thinking to the 'media archaeologies' generated by media and technology scholars. And it helped me to focus on what I need to do in September as part of the Archaeo-Cube project, an archaeology of [Cube Microplex](#), a volunteer-run arts-and-media space in Bristol. In advance of a significant building project, a small group of archaeologists and Cube volunteers are producing diverse archaeological responses to the site and thinking through the possible futures of the Cube following the build project and what might be worth 'preserving' and how. And these things remind me of archaeology's links to the modern individual and, in addition to the

collaborative work in the field and within communities, how central lone practices of attention are to the archaeological project.

## REFERENCES

Kipling, R. 1899. *From Sea to Sea*. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/32977/32977-h/32977-h.htm>

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