

JUST HOW ARE ARCHAEOLOGISTS MADE?

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The world of professional archaeology is a varied and wonderful thing but sometimes it's easy to get absorbed into the daily grind and forget what it was that got you into archaeology in the first place. Sometimes though, there are times when that spark re-ignites and you walk home with a bounce in your step, unburdened by the weight of those planning applications you have to comment on or reports that are waiting patiently to go into the Historic Environment Record. I've experienced one of those times recently during the supervision of a work experience placement. It came during the handling of objects notably, a flint tool of possible Palaeolithic date. When describing the manufacture of this object and the fact that we were only a handful of people to have touched it in thousands of years, made me remember why I love the subject so much. Seeing inspiration dawn and the glow of excitement re-ignites the embers of that spark and you realise just how privileged you are....

Here at Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service, we're lucky to be able to offer work experience placements across the Service for students who are studying from A levels right up to higher education. It's a somewhat unique experience as we combine archaeology and archives so students can get a broad knowledge of the diversity of roles. For the past three weeks, Kat Webber, an A level student, has been with us working on a variety of projects throughout the Service. Here she describes her experience during her time with us...

Sacrificing four weeks of my last ever school summer holiday perhaps seemed a little daunting three weeks ago. However, as I sit here now, in the comfortable archaeological niche in the basement of the Hive (Worcester library), it is with a disappointed frown that I realise next Monday will be the start of my last week here. Of course, I am tired; even with all the unsympathetic glares of more seasoned workers as I go on about my long 10-til-4 shift, concentrating for a whole day (especially so when the hottest day of the year was spent in an office-like greenhouse, three floors up, typing records into the HER system) is hard work.

I wouldn't ever complain though, this opportunity has surpassed my expectations ten-fold.

Archaeology, as I found out at a young age having experienced the wonders of Indiana Jones, is not all cursed hidden treasure and precarious chases on the tops of speeding trains, (though I still have a week left, so you never know). What I didn't realise though was its true extent, far beyond that of the movies. It's about preserving, displaying and expanding history; it's about public outreach, conservation and filling in the unknown, about problem solving, people and waiting an aggravating amount of time for a GIS map to load.

To me, 'History' holds the most elusive agenda in modern life. Yes, there are reaches of science that boggle even the brightest, space travel and time are too almost foreign to our species – and the future is

one big scary unknown (being a student on the verge of leaving home I know this more than most). The past, though, is something that has actually happened and yet we know so little about. A whole different type of speculation.

That is why, while holding the remnants of a Neolithic decorated pot in my suitably dusty hands, I was almost brought to tears. The idea that 5000 years ago someone, so much like us but so far away, went out of their way to create such a beautiful, intricate (ironic) legacy. Not once would they have believed that so far in the future I would stand, awestruck by their design, with my thumb in the grooved pattern made by their own. This was a person who wouldn't have even comprehended such a future. To think that their imagination was as powerful a force as to survive through eons, it's both enlightening and harrowing.

My time in Finds has been extraordinary to say the least. From the 2000 year old roman pottery that, wonderfully, still holds the traces of the maker's fingerprints, to the magnificent presence of an almost whole mammoth tusk found in my very own Worcestershire (even in the windowless and a little cramped confines of the storage rooms, I could imagine the size and power of such a beast as if it were right in front of me.) These last two days processing and bagging Iron Age pottery from a recent site, even this has been incomparable. Getting distracted by large trays of pot fragments and attempting to recreate segments like a three dimensional monotonous jigsaw where you don't know which pieces you have or don't.

Most of my time, however, was spent with the Historic Environment Record department upstairs. This is where archaeology meets present tense. When a company or organisation wants to build somewhere it must be checked for archaeological potential, which of course makes a lot of sense, yet many people simply don't appreciate the work that goes into it. A lot of work – DBAs or WBs (I have learned a lot of abbreviations), the steps that go to protecting our past are prolific.

Archaeologists, I think, are a separate group of people. They see things through the eyes of archaeological knowledge, of course, but from my experience they are also more aware, individual and wistful. I may be a little biased, of course, in planning to study Archaeology and Anthropology at university. I have asked so many questions and all have been answered with a smile and a laugh. Along with the amazing experiences, that smile and laugh is something I will be taking with me when I leave.



Iron Age Pot Base reconstructed by work experience student Kat