

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL WRITER – MY OWN PAST IS MY NEW DAY

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Shiqmim, Negev Desert, Israel 1984 – hot, remote, with tough living conditions. Photo: Dr Eleanor Scott

I worked for a long time in the field on archaeological excavations and surveys, in the UK, the Isle of Man and in the Middle East, and now I'm lucky enough to be able to write about it all and get my research, stories and ideas online as an "open access" (free) resource. Every day is different, but the common theme is that I run and write content for an [archaeology website](#) and blog. I spend a great deal of time delving into the past, and I use my own archaeological past as a way of illustrating points about excavations.

In particular I'm working on a series of posts on "[The Challenges of Excavation](#)", including physical and mental challenges, and basic things like feeding volunteers properly and keeping them safe. I spent a lot of years working on archaeological excavations and saw the best of people and sometimes I saw situations that were less than ideal. In particular I'm extremely keen to highlight how digs can be inclusive, and to give examples of good practice to show how it's possible to make provision for potential diggers who face challenges around physical, mental, sensory or medical issues, rather than choosing to exclude them.



Castell Henllys, Wales 1981 – collegiate, eccentric & a good digging experience. Photo: Dr Eleanor Scott

Often I start with an old photograph of a dig I was on, perhaps of me or a fellow digger doing something interesting, and I start writing around it. Today I'm working on part two of a piece that gives guidance on [feeding diggers](#). It might sound trivial, but believe me it's not. A crew of physically active volunteers need to keep up their morale – and they need food that they can eat, and lots of it. In tandem with this today I'm making a few more 'dig dinners' to photograph, including vegan and gluten-free, to demonstrate how relatively easy they actually are to cook in less than optimal kitchen conditions. I am nothing if not dedicated! At the end of a cold, wet March day in Wales, vegetarian diggers want something like a big plate of macaroni cheese with a 'side' of mixed vegetables, not a chicory salad with a 'side' of cress.



I'm also noting down some thoughts today that have been triggered by stuff bubbling up on social media (I use Twitter a lot), as ideas for a future blog piece. There are some concerns around dig cooking being affected by the strong undertow of (often unconscious) gender biases, i.e. it's what Theresa May might describe as a "girl's job". I already argue that everybody should take turns mucking in to help in the kitchen, and that that's part of the collegiality of a dig – people should take pride in successfully feeding their colleagues and keeping up their strength and spirits. I've already also suggested making "dig cook" a proper staff position, with decision-making and budget-holding capacity. So I'm going to develop that argument. Give the job status, and undermine the sexism.

I'll also read some emails about technical upgrades from my website provider, and put the bins out.

And that's what I'm working on today. Writing, cooking, photographing, uploading and editing – all inspired by archaeology, all derived from that seemingly insatiable desire to move earth and stones and observe the only ever partially-knowable past. I'd like to help others carry on the practice of excavation safely and collectively, and to produce their best work – and to try to make them want to come back next season for more.

