

# RANDOM THOUGHTS ON WORLD WAR I, THE DAY OF ARCHAEOLOGY, BREXIT AND MARBLE HILL.

July 28, 2017   Kevin Wooldridge   Archives, Day of Archaeology 2017, Fieldwork, UK

I have checked back on previous years' posts and this year is the first occasion since 2011 when I will not be 'in the field' on the last Friday in July. I am on leave from a project in Sweden, where I have been working since April, and my next UK project with Historic England doesn't begin until the week after next. But I am trying to usefully fill this downtime. Sunday the 31<sup>st</sup> July is the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the Passchendaele campaign in WW1. One of my great uncles Edward Jeffery, 89<sup>th</sup> battalion, Machine Gun Corps was unfortunately a casualty on day one of the battle; just one of what eventually turned out to be over a quarter of a million casualties of that campaign. There are some small and fairly low key commemorations going on. My eye was caught by a photo of a sculpture made from Passchendaele mud being exhibited in London. It will be exposed to the elements after Sunday and allowed to decay with the British weather. I am sure that someone somewhere is exploring the archaeology of Passchendaele and a monument from mud seems eminently suitable..



*Sculpture made from Passchendaele mud*

I have spent some time this week at various record offices, archives and libraries in London and the south of England, trying to find out what history survives of Edward Jeffery and other relatives who took part in that and other WW1 campaigns. Record offices are one of the great, still largely free, resources in the UK, but as with many things under threat through the UK government's policy of 'austerity'. Yesterday I was in Maidstone looking at archives related to the Royal West Kent Regiment, (the regiment Jeffery enlisted in before he joined the Machine Gun Corps). There are 4 huge scrapbooks of RWK

memorabilia in that archive, including original photos, maps and reports from Passchendaele, that probably rarely see the light of day. It would be a shame if access to this material was restricted. There are many lessons to be learnt from the past and archives are an essential part of the conservation and education process.



*National Archives Kew, London*

One of the triumphs of the EU has been the lessening of conflict between European nations. We are free to move around Europe, live and work with people whom a hundred years ago we were expected to hate and be hated in return. Over the years my posts to 'Day of Archaeology' have come from a number of different countries, a fair few within the EU. Last year my post was all about the consequences of the UK voting for Brexit and the effect that decision might have on archaeology and archaeologists. Unfortunately the picture 12 months on is no clearer. But it is beginning to impact on archaeologists working in the UK....The following quote is from a recent post to a UK web forum, offering advice from one EU national working in archaeology to another prospective EU national job seeker.

*'As an EU citizen, living in the UK now for 2 years (did a MA here and now a PhD student) I advise you to think carefully about how badly you want to move here. Within the archaeology and within university environments you don't notice very much of Brexit in the sense of a negative attitude towards EU citizens. In daily life in Britain however the air has chilled. My positive thinking of a future here with my English girlfriend has changed a lot as well as my feeling of wellbeing. The media is not helpful, neither are the old ladies on the bus who chat about the great future of Britain without immigrants. The government is most disrespectful about EU citizens and at its best just not interested in what happens to us. I won't put you off the idea but I think it is a good to know'*

The post was one I hoped never to read in an UK archaeology forum... No further comment is necessary.



The week after next I will be working at Marble Hill House in London... I think we will have a twitter thing and news updates on the Historic England web page, but anyone walking through Marble Hill Park in the month of August, please come and talk to the archaeologists behind the fence. We are always happy to chat...



*Marble Hill House, London*



It's very sad to hear that this is going to be the last 'Day of Archaeology' blog. I have been adding my thoughts since 2011 and have always enjoyed reading what other folk are doing on this day. Some people of course I know (I am a very old lag who has been around the block a few times), but many I don't. 'Day of Archaeology' blog seems to not only capture the enthusiasm and passion of student and early career archaeologists, but also the eagerness of specialists to let us into their small empires of knowledge; it allows non-professionals to remind us that archaeology is more than a vocation and the 'aged and infirmed' to share the pains they have acquired along their archaeological path. I hope someone picks up 'Day of Archaeology' blog and it continues beyond this year. It is a tradition worth preserving.