

Finds Processing

"Archaeology is like a Box of Chocolates. You never know what you're gonna' get."

Everyone's idea of an entire Archeologically discovery, the Dig, actually only makes up less than 10% of the whole journey. For years after the trenches are backfilled, archaeologists are still using the data and material taken from that excavation to learn about our past. Of course, the main evidence is the finds; something that Folkestone Roman Villa and pre-historic settlement dig of 2011 on Eastcliff has a lot of. Possibly being a major trading post and port in the Late Iron Age, the site has produced tray after tray of Domestic material and as many small finds¹ as there are contexts² (over 1000). That is extremely high when you compare it to the total area dug and requires a lot of Processing time and activities.



The Finds and their Journey

Thanks to the dating of the many finds and their layers, we can say that East Cliff was occupied from around 8,000 years ago (although some flint artefacts may be earlier) right up until the late Roman Period with the late Iron Age the peak of prosperity (according to the number of finds from that era and their content). As the dig went down through the many layers they had to put the finds in trays with a context number. This number refers to the area in the dig from which the finds come from.



Having removed the finds from the earth the next step is to wash them. The 'Pot-washers' (who have been re-named by Finds Supervisor Catherine Holtham-Oakley, 'Artefact Hygienists' in want of a more professional name) washed the artefacts on site keeping them within their contexts. Some finds such as metal and plaster, which rust/disintegrate in water, have to be kept dirty. This initial stage in the finds processing is the first time many of the artefacts are truly seen



as dirt hides decoration and sometimes the very material; a good motivator for anyone sitting outside with a bucket of water. Much of the small finds are found in the washing stage but it is also where many 'false friends' are also uncovered. The Eastcliff site is notorious for the material Iron stone which, covered in mud, easily fools the archaeologists into thinking they've uncovered a flint, piece of pot or even bone. Being a natural deposit, Iron stone rarely

has archaeological use and is thrown away as soon as it's uncovered.



Once they've been bagged up on site, the finds are then transported to a Storage centre. Last year this was in a shop in Tontine Street and this year it is in Dover Docks. Here the next stages of the



Processing are taking Place. All the contexts have been put in order and the Volunteers are gradually working their way through them carrying out the following. Each context must be sorted out into its own different material categories (eg. Flint, bone, pottery, shell, etc.). Finds of a special material (Daub³, Chaffware⁴, Metal, Glass, Fossils, Plaster, Tesserae⁵ and



Charcoal) is taken into the stores office for professional examination. Meanwhile the pottery is then marked- its context number and the dig's abbreviation (ATU/1) is written on it with Indian ink. Giving the vast amount of artefacts, only the pots have been given priority for this. Eventually, once everything has been marked and varnished, the finds need to be filed onto a database. This will provide an official record of the dig's discoveries for those who need to refer to them in future.

Up to this point, all of this has been done by hard working volunteers who have kindly given up their spare time to work with the project. The next step for the various artefacts is with the experts. A Specialist in each field (ie. a Potter Expert, a Animal Bone Expert ect.) will be sent a selection of finds to examine them in detail and eventually make up a report on their judgement which should contribute to the final document about the dig's discoveries. This will be long awaited as the site has already shown obvious potential in dismissing the present idea that the area has only been inhabited for a few centuries.

Taking Part

During the Digging period, the site was the weekend destination for dozens of Folkestone residents and others from the wider area. Now, the finds processing is in full swing at the Dover Docks Storage centre and these dedicated volunteers are still the driving force of the project. I myself have taken part in the dig and am spending the occasional day there. Today (6th February) I interviewed Kate, the Finds Supervisor who was mentioned earlier, at the Docks about her view on the Project.

Kate is an archaeologist and is extremely passionate about the Eastcliff site given its potential to change the public's perspective on Folkestone as a historic area.

"The thing is, Folkestone is not like Dover because Dover has visual evidence for a Historic Past. I mean, there's the Castle, the Roman Pharos and the Bronze Age Boat- which may have come from Folkestone. All you see in Folkestone is Victorian building after another. But now, here's the evidence which proves that people inhabited Folkestone 8,000 years early than previously thought and was even a major port. I think it's a big shame that the People of Folkestone don't know about their heritage, which I think they should be proud of. I'm an archaeologist and I didn't even know there was a villa here in Folkestone until I joined the dig two years ago and before now, 99% were probably the same."



Kate has crossed the board with the amount of activities she's taken part in with ATU. From Digging to Washing, to Talks and to Marking she has done it all. Today, I asked her how excavating compared to Finds processing in her mind.



“Well they are both interesting in their own way. Obviously, Digging is much more physically demanding compared to having to sit down yet Finds Processing can be rather tedious. But, like housework, it needs to be done as the experts charge us a



blimmin' fortune if a find gets to them and it's all dirty. With digging you do get that sense that you are the first person in what 1,000, 2,000, 3000 years old. But it is just as special to be the first to see it cleaned up and with finds processing you can go much more in depth and spend time



with it, so to speak. You can examine all the pretty patterns, show it to the people around you, talk about it and hopefully learn about it. That's what this is all about; it's a learning process.

“What's more, you occasionally come across something really, really nice and it doesn't have to be made of gold or silver. Oh no. My favourite finds from this dig are two broken roof tiles and indented into one was the paw print of a little doggy and the other a little kitty. It was funny because days later I was walking through town and

on the pavement was a layer of cement, only a year old at best, and in it was also a line of doggy paw prints. And something like that really brought it home and you can just imagine an angry roman workman shouting at the dog to get off his drying tiles just as one would today. And that's the thing about Archaeology. It really is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you're gonna' get.”

Whatever the activity, Archaeology is the perfect opportunity whether it is for experience, knowledge about our past or just meeting new people. Finds processing is as much a social time as it is an important role in the Project.



“Here at the docks we have wonderful facilities and we are very lucky to work in such there. We have a kitchen complete with a fridge, toaster and microwave. But the best part is working with such fantastic people. On site we met the likes of Keith Parfitt and other great archaeologists whom it is a privilege to work with. And the ordinary people as well. It is amazing how many people are fascinated by archaeology and their heritage and everyone is wonderful. In terms of the Finds processing I can't complain about anything but it would be nice to have a lot more volunteers. You don't require any training, everyone's friendly and you can turn up

whenever you like. There is a lot to be done so we could really do with the extra manpower.”

Written By Harry Platts

Special thanks to Catherine Holtham-Oakley

- 1 finds of special individual importance
- 2 sections of the site as organised by location and age
- 3 building material made from mud manure and such like. Used in wooden (parts of) buildings.
- 4 form of Kentish pottery. Eastcliff is the first site to have enough of it to make an educated guess as to how it was made, shaped and used.
- 5 Small cubes used to construct mosaics.



A Day at the Finds Processing By Molly Clare

My initial thought when I entered the Canterbury Archaeological Trust's finds stores, located at the Dover Eastern docks, was just how much had been found at the East Cliff villa site. The amount of bone, shells and tile was overwhelming. Despite having volunteered at the excavation during the summer I remained ignorant of any archaeological processes and had never given time to consider what happens following a dig.



The first activity to complete was placing bags of bone and shell in boxes



labelled with their context numbers. This really highlighted just how much material had been unearthed in two years. The majority of the day was committed to writing the context number, the number given to an area of the dig, in black ink (black ink was required for the lighter fragments of pottery, while white was to be used for the darker pieces) on impossibly small fragments of tile and pottery. The time spent considering each fragments allows for a moment to identify any interesting pattern, anything that went unnoticed during the excavation. Though many will regard the processing phase as less interesting in comparison to the excavation, I would argue that



finds processing provided me with another fantastic opportunity to reconsider the discoveries of the excavation, and would be equally fascinating to anybody new to the project. Spending the day with volunteer Monica Butcher, it was immediately obvious that those involved are highly dedicated. Monica, who recently undertook an archaeology course, had been involved with the project for a significant amount of time and is a member of the recently established Folkestone Research Archaeology Group. Her personal interest in archaeology expanded to holiday destinations, and most of the day was spent discussing the various sites of historical interest we have both visited (and how I should have visited the Pergamon Museum located at Museum Island during my trip to Berlin last year).

