

My Day of Archaeology with Worcestershire Young Archaeologists' Club



Using a sickle

This year, my Day of Archaeology coincided with an event I had organised for the Festival of Archaeology, based at the Worcestershire Young Archaeologists' Club Allotment. The Allotment was acquired in early 2012 as a space for our young archaeologists (or YACs) to be able to undertake experimental activities, gain practical archaeological experience and to provide a resource for further activities during the year. It was selected as a result of research undertaken using the Worcester City Historic Environment Record, which identified potential Roman settlement in the area, and therefore may provide a rare window into previously unseen archaeology.



Excavating a test pit

Over the course of the past 18 months we have fought a long battle with the brambles and finally this summer were ready to harvest our first crop, a traditional long-strawed wheat. We decided to run a day-long event with our young archaeologists so that they could get involved with the whole process of harvesting, using traditional methods. Alongside these activities we also undertook to excavate a 1m x 1m test pit, to develop their practical archaeological skills. The club has a strong mission to involve young people in real research, not just for the fun of it (though of course we have fun along the way), but to provide something of value to the archaeological record and to promote the sense that these very capable young people are contributing work completed to professional standards, and adding to our collective knowledge. All the activities we undertake are set within their archaeological context, so the evidence for the experimental methods we are using on site is set out from the start, as well as evidence for plant and seed remains and the like. We were very grateful to draw on the expertise of Environmental Archaeologist Liz Pearson who has been involved with this project from the outset.

We're not afraid to take risks. Every YAC got to have a go with the sickle to cut the wheat crop



A finished corn dolly

down! Once cut, the wheat was bundled up and left to dry, except for a handful of stems used to make corn dollies, which proved to be quite a fiddly enterprise, though extremely absorbing. Using a supply of grain which had already been dried, we were

able to practice winnowing away the chaff and then used our rotary quern stone to make flour.



Finds at the #WYACAllotment

Meanwhile, over in our test pit, Rob Hedge, CBA Community Archaeology placement and member of the WYAC team, made sure that everyone was well-versed in Pythagoras Theorem as he explained how to set out a trench correctly. A number of finds were uncovered within the top 20cm of soil including quite a few pieces of Roman iron slag, 18th/19th century clay pipe and what we believe to be the handle of a Tudor cup. These finds will be processed by our YAC members and written up for inclusion within the HER. In the meantime, live reporting via Twitter ensured that a greater audience than just those that could attend was engaged using our site hashtag #WYACAllotment. We hope now to develop this project further, to build an ongoing resource for skills training and experimental techniques into the future. At the time of writing a rather fine crop of flax is ripening and we hope to harvest and process this during the summer holidays!



Bringing in the Harvest (with kind permission of Rob Hedge)

Source: <http://www.dayofarchaeology.com/my-day-of-archaeology-with-worcestershire-young-archaeologists-club/>