



Fiona Isobel Watson

Fiona received her undergraduate Archaeology MA and her post graduate MSc Landscape Integrated Research and Practice from the University of Glasgow. With a strong background in community archaeology, training participants, working with schools and youth groups and leading on projects, Fiona is thoroughly enjoying her time as the Learning Officer for Scotland's Urban Past, a community engagement project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and led by Historic Environment Scotland. If she had to pick a part of Scotland to focus her study of archaeology on (apart from Shetland of course) it would have to be the areas of Ayrshire and Inverclyde where she grew up.

Why archaeology?

I've always liked "old stuff." However, that doesn't really explain 'why archaeology?' For me it goes beyond just finding an interest in the old and the odd. Archaeology is a way of investigating past human actions and experience and trying to gain a greater understanding of them. It's the mystery factor that comes with that. Your brain is wrapping itself around these little snippets of information hoping to make some sense of it, your imagination then must fill in the gaps. It's this inquiry, creativity and ultimately never quite knowing that makes archaeology so tantalizing for me.

What is your favourite site on Shetland?

Now that would be telling...

If you could time travel to any era/answer any question what would it be?

This is tricky - there are so many times and places I would like to visit. If I could time travel to any era (and come back safely) I'd like to go back roughly 30,000 years to when homo-sapiens were joined by other types of hominins. This is something that's come up a few times chatting to friends and colleagues, who no doubt would like to come along! I think it would be fascinating to see how the differences and similarities identified in the archaeological record, in terms of biology and technology, actually played out in day to day behavior. Alternatively, I'd go back to Iron Age Britain, around the time of the Roman invasion, and write an account that I hope would be slightly more balanced than those presented by Caesar or Tacitus.

What is your waking nightmare, archaeologically speaking?

I think this would probably be the same for many archaeologists but I would have to say spending a significant amount of time excavating or recording an immensely interesting site and then having those records stolen, damaged or destroyed. Just thinking about something like that happening makes me involuntarily shudder.

If you could have only one tool in the field what would it be and why?

These days I would probably say a phone or tablet – you can take notes and photos on it, download a compass, pull up current and historical maps, CANMORE records, order a pizza...tweet yourself eating the pizza. The list is endless.

Do you have a song/band you use for inspiration either in the field or the office?

At the moment it's the Guardians of the Galaxy 'Awesome Mix Vols 1 and 2.' It's very up-beat with plenty of 70's/80's tunes and great to listen to on the walk into work.

Be honest, does a part of you wish you were Indiana Jones?

Of course!

If you could debunk one myth or misinformed idea in/about archaeology what would it be?

That all we do is "dig stuff up". Yes, excavation plays an important role in what we do but it is by no means the be all and end all. There are so many different techniques archaeologists can use to investigate and promote an understanding of the past, from surveying and recording sites and buildings to pouring over maps, aerial photographs and historical documents. In fact, that's another bug bear – that archaeologists don't do "history" and vice versa. Actually, historical texts feed into what we do and any historian worth their salt should never ignore the archaeological record. We can use what we find on (and in) the ground to challenge old historical narratives and contribute to the production of new or alternative ones.