

# So, archaeology isn't just about digging holes?!

## Taking part in an eight-week summer placement at ClfA

**In July 2019, Natalie Olembó joined us on an eight-week placement as part of the Historic England Heritage Training placements specifically for individuals of Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic heritage.**

**These placements form part of Historic England's strategy to make sure the heritage workforce properly represents the UK population, and were offered in a variety of roles from collections care to visitor operations, from marketing and PR to graphic design.**

**In this article, Natalie shares her experience of her time with ClfA and induction into the world of professional archaeology.**

*The roof terrace at the Historic England office in London. Credit: Natalie Olembó*



When I applied for my placement, I knew nothing about archaeologists other than they dug holes in the ground. What attracted me to the placement was the opportunity to broaden my understanding about a sector I had little knowledge of and to be involved in two projects that echo some of the interests and passions that I have.

Two words to describe my first few days at ClfA were 'information overload'. I had to get my head around how ClfA operates as a professional body and learn about what

archaeology really was – it's not just digging holes in the ground!

The two projects outlined in my placement brief were a careers information project and developing a ClfA 'ambassador' scheme. The careers project was a research-based task with the goal of identifying ways that ClfA can promote study and careers in archaeology effectively and to a wider audience. The second project, developing an ambassador scheme, focused on gathering information on how ClfA currently communicates with its

membership and seeing if there are any ways that ClfA can ensure that not only is information being distributed effectively within the membership but it is also being understood. Alongside this I attended various meetings with different staff members to fully understand what ClfA is truly about.

Throughout both projects one thing that I came to appreciate was the autonomy I was given during my time here. While I knew that the help was there if I needed it, the fact that I had full autonomy over the content of the projects and how I completed them meant that I was able to understand what ClfA does for myself. There is an importance in forming your own understanding of things, as it allows you to grasp concepts that were foreign for you. Furthermore, I was able to express my own opinions on certain matters and this can be clearly seen in the three blogs I wrote for the Institute, which give my take on certain areas of ClfA and archaeology: <https://www.archaeologists.net/NatalieOlembó>

I have come away from my placement with two key points of understanding about professional archaeology. The first is recognition of the massive potential archaeology has. I was surprised to find out that in archaeology as an undergraduate you can go for a Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science. The versatility that archaeology has is incredible. When choosing my degree, I wanted something which would mean I could go down any career path that I wanted. If I had known about how versatile archaeology was, I would have considered taking it as part of my undergraduate studies, which is why I cannot stress enough the importance of archaeology marketing itself as this versatile study. The analytical skills through to the skills needed to present information in a coherent way, which archaeology offers, are valued by employers. Getting people to understand the value that studying archaeology can bring will mean people start seeing the value it has within society and why it's important.

The second key point is the need for effective promotion. Without people understanding how archaeology affects their daily lives they are unlikely to go out of their way to research or understand what is involved in archaeology. So, it's down to those within the profession to promote what archaeology does. For ClfA this is through its advocacy work and collaborating with various organisations within the heritage sector to promote the importance of archaeology and heritage. But for day-to-day archaeologists, this can be reaching out to



*Natalie reviewing questionnaire responses as part of her project research. Credit: Anna Welch, ClfA*

communities and trying to increase the visibility of archaeology. At secondary school, we never had someone representing archaeology or heritage come and speak to us about the profession and after the axing of archaeology as an A-level it means that archaeology has disappeared altogether from schools.

By promoting the work that you do as an archaeologist on your social media or taking an opportunity to go into schools and talk about what you do will help in making the sector visible.

The experience at ClfA has been invaluable. Not only did I learn so much about a sector that I never knew about, but I also learnt more about myself and what I want out of a career in the future. The opportunities to go and sit in various meetings and see the passion that people have for their profession has shown me why doing something you love, no matter how difficult, is important. Huge thanks to my mentors Anna Welch and Kate Geary, who have helped me every step of the way, and also to every single member of staff here at ClfA for welcoming me in and allowing me to tag along to meetings, and for taking the time to speak and help me with my projects.



*Chris Elmer teaching one of the Southampton Young Archaeologists to use a level. Credit: Alex Walker*

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