

Govan Old Archaeology - 'Dig Where You Stand' 2024

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I have been excavating at Govan Old church on and off since the 1990s, always using a combination of students, professional archaeologists and members of the local community. It seemed only right that community be allowed to participate in the excavation of their archaeology, but in 2024 we launched a new fieldwork initiative called '*Dig Where You Stand*', which is designed to increase public visibility of the ongoing redevelopment work at Govan Old and improve community participation. The main excavation season coincided with the opening of the new pedestrian bridge to the Riverside Museum and was hugely successful in terms of broadening participation beyond the academic community while continuing to deliver significant archaeological discoveries. This 'report' differs from the technical Data Structure Report by Clyde Archaeology, as this is built around 15 personal reflections by members of the excavation team, mostly GU Honours and Post-graduate students.

The archaeological work at Govan Old began in June with a small team of Glasgow University students, who began by unwrapping the winter protection from the excavation site, resuming the probing survey of the graveyard and preparing the site for increased numbers of volunteer and student participants. From the end of August until Doors Open weekend (23/9) the dig involved 100 excavators drawn from the GU student population (43) and a diverse group (57) of volunteer predominantly from the local community. Most days the fieldwork team amounted to over 40 individuals working under the guidance of GU staff, postgraduates and alongside professionals from Clyde Archaeology. This strong local interest in the archaeology has been grown in the years since the pandemic, but received a timely boost thanks to the press coverage generated by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland who grant-aided the public engagement element of *Dig Where You Stand*.

We resumed excavating at Govan Old as part of the redevelopment building works and over the past few seasons our ability to conduct fieldwork has been sustained by goodwill from every quarter, not least from the group of students which has formed around the project and is now shaping its direction. Their enthusiasm is evident in the short reflections embedded within this summary report. They selected the topics themselves with the only guidance being to keep it short.

The bridge opening has made 2024 an exceptional year for Govan, marking a regeneration watershed because of the anticipated economic benefit of restoring the connection to the north side of the river. The opening attracted the largest crowds to Govan Old since the Govan Heritage Trust began monitoring visitor numbers 15 years ago. In the final two months of the season (September and October) Govan Old welcomed three times as many visitors than during the same period in 2022 and in 2023. If this level of visits holds up it will be transformational. The excavation also provided opportunities to introduce school groups from the Govan Gaelic School, Glendale and St Saviours to the active investigation of their past. The high level of participation and popular interest confirms our belief that the public places a high value on authentic heritage. As a means of better understanding community experience and the value placed on the heritage Rachel MacDonald recorded audio interviews with a range of the visitors to the excavations, perhaps the beginning of an oral history of Govan Old.

Govan Archives: Interviews and Engagement

Rachel McDonald (Senior Hons)

Over the course of the Govan Old dig including the community days and field school weeks, there were a myriad of people who crossed our trenches and told us what they thought. The feedback referred to here was gathered as part of an interview project named “The Govan Archives”, where students and I interviewed participants on their experiences at Govan Old. The interviews included volunteers, community members passing through as well as staff and students. With such a diverse group to interview we soon realised that the project would gather quite the oral history of the site, with childhood memories of playing on hogbacks, and the impressions of first timers on a dig.



The hogbacks sitting in the churchyard of Govan Old, were a poignant memory for the locals who played on them as children (Image: W. Milne in TCF Brochie's The History of Govan, 1905). The hogbacks inside the Church occupy the space where one of our interviewees practiced performances with the Girls Brigade in the 2000s. (Image: R. McDonald).

This project was an endeavour into community engagement on site, with the Govan-Partick Footbridge Festival acting as a catalyst, provoking lingering memories within the community. Many of those interviewed said they had returned to Govan for the day to see the bridge festivities and set foot through the church doors once more, with an extraordinary turnout exceeding 1,800 people.

Essentially, these interviews are our way of marrying the trenches with people who remember the churchyard regardless of the archaeology. The community will stay. They are the ones who will remember the team of University of Glasgow students and staff who resided in their churchyard in the summer dig season, 2024. Ultimately, for them to be interested in the stories we tell; we must be interested in the stories they tell.

EXCAVATIONS IN SE 'CORNER' OF THE CHURCHYARD

This season we continued to explore the original entrance in the south-east edge of the churchyard. This season a considerable effort was spent disentangling early medieval levels from rubbish dumps of the late 19th- and early 20th-century. These modern deposits yielded a rich assemblage of domestic articles, along with the occasional fragments of burial monuments. The initial stages of finds cleaning and assessment proved a popular way for a significant proportion of our volunteers to participate in the project. Collectively this 'modern rubbish' will make a significant contribution to understanding the social life and domestic economy of the Govan during its shipbuilding heyday.

The Modern Finds

Phil Gould (MRes)

The modern finds from the Govan Old 2024 excavations may not appear to be as interesting as more traditionally exciting finds from the graveyard, such as the ‘Govan Warrior’ from the 2023 dig. The modern finds do, however, serve an important role for teaching and communicating during the community open days and the fieldschool. They were an opportunity for students and volunteers to practice artefact handling and processing in the field and discuss related theory and interpretation with peers and mentors in a casual social context.

Modern finds also provide an interesting community engagement tool, as they reflect the remembered past of the current community at Govan, allowing members of the public to engage with material culture relevant and reflective of themselves. These modern finds can be a tool for opening discussion, allowing community members to approach the material on their own terms and based on their own interests. The objects can become a way of exploring memory, demonstrating the continual history of the site, and an exploration of people, material and place through conversation with members of the community. There is a value to modern finds, outside of traditional archaeological practices and more reflection to be done on why and when practitioners discard or keep modern finds on an archaeological excavation.



Cleaning and sorting the finds on site (Image: S. Miller).

One Man's Trash...

Nicola McMahon (MSc)

A display of artefacts from the 2023 midden excavation was used to engage with members of the public who were at Govan Old Parish Church in September during the celebrations for the opening of the new bridge linking Partick to Govan, and during Doors Open Day.



Artefacts laid out ready for public engagement. (Image: N. McMahon 2024).

The display, which included objects dating from the mid-19th to the mid-20th centuries, as well as some contemporary advertising material and maps showing the church and the surrounding streets between 1860 and 1960, was laid out in loose groups including: bottles from the nineteenth century; condiments; lighting; milk bottles; ceramics. These particular items were selected for a number of reasons: they were in good condition, there was a narrative or context that could be attached to them or they showed change over time and facilitated comparison.

Over the course of both events, many people stopped at the table to look at the objects with the vast majority open to discussing them and hearing about where and how they had been discovered. Items that were in some way familiar to individuals or that prompted feelings of nostalgia drew by far the most interest, particularly the collection of old milk bottles, with the presence of the third-of-a-pint school milk bottle the catalyst for many people to reminisce about the horrors of school milk and experiences of it being consumed partially frozen or, even worse, warm from being kept next to radiators.

Objects from different times but with similar purposes were juxtaposed, for example a glass oil lamp base with a plastic light shade and the blood mixture bottle with a more recent medicine bottle. These comparisons, both with personal experiences or between objects from different times, helped to situate people alongside the artefacts and acted as a reminder that they are the proxy for the people who had used them.

As the modern overburden was removed the scale of the square stone building (505), which formerly stood against the boundary wall became apparent. This building was demolished in the mid-20th century and only survived below the turf, but the wall stands over a metre high and founded at the earliest level on the site. We know that immediately following the discovery of the sarcophagus (nearby), this building was erected in 1858 to provide rudimentary shelter for it and some of the other stones. This location and sturdiness of the building suggests it may have an earlier origin, perhaps as a gate house or chapel. We hope that future excavations will reveal the precise date and function of this substantial structure.

The Possible Doorway of Structure 505

Alexander McClure (Junior Honours)



The Possible Doorway of Structure 505, Trench G. (Image: A. Palyvos 2024).

Over the past two dig seasons at Govan Old, one of the most puzzling aspects of the site has been the square stone structure on the inside of the graveyard wall to the east. One aspect of the structure which has been of particular interest to me is the possible presence of a doorway on its northern facing wall. The possibility of a doorway was initially suggested during the 2023 dig season, as it became apparent through excavation of a small portion of the structure's internal fill that the inside face of the wall is broken by a section of rough, irregularly sized stones, which project significantly out from the otherwise regular course of the stonework.

During this year's excavations, acting on the notion that the structure was constructed, or at least remodelled to preserve and house the Govan sarcophagus (Ferguson et al. 'Antiquarian Intelligence', J. Brit. Archaeol. Assoc. 1894, 50(3), 281), measurements were taken of the possible doorway from the 2023 season, which showed a width of 61cm. This would not have been wide enough to allow the passage of the sarcophagus, which measures 79cm at its widest extent. Based on this fact, re-evaluation of the stones in the wall revealed to us a pair of roughly rectangular, parallel stones which run perpendicular to the wall (above). If we are to take these as the base of the original door jambs, then the doorway would measure 132cm in width, almost exactly double the width of the sarcophagus. It is not hard to imagine the sarcophagus being carried through a doorway of this size, a man on each corner.

The removal of modern rubbish deposits has clarified the overall site sequence, too. As always with archaeology, interpretive ideas advanced before excavation are subject to revisions, as Luca McCall discovered.

The ‘Sarcophagus Pit’

Luca McCall (Senior Hons)

Following the 2023 season, a focus of mine for 2024 was to investigate what we had romantically termed the ‘Sarcophagus Pit’. Such romanticism bloomed from parallels we drew between this feature and various nineteenth century accounts of the Govan Sarcophagus’ (re-)discovery. The feature, characterised by a darker soil forming a rough U or V-shape, was situated south of the structure in Trench G in the east-facing section. I believed, wrongly as it transpired, that in this feature we would uncover the sarcophagus’ missing lid.



The Possible Pit Feature in the East Facing Section of Trench G Prior to Excavation. (Image: L. McCall).

Stratigraphically, the pit appeared uniform, though its interface to the south was more definite than to the north, which appeared more gradual (see above image). We wondered if such gradation was the consequence of a potential disturbance, possibly trample from the nineteenth century excavation. As we excavated, it did not take long for me to realise I was wrong. The feature was far too shallow (see image), to accommodate the 7-foot sarcophagus which was said to be orientated east-west. In short, it could not fit. The disappointment continued; excavating the feature I realised that we were still excavating the dreaded backfill of the 1996 trench, ubiquitous during the 2023 season.

The northerly cavity pictured below was the consequence of modern concrete paving slabs. The soil here was particularly loose, wet, and dark, likely later backfill following the 1997 excavations. I also suspected that the JCB employed for the 1997 excavations had created the feature’s distinct stratigraphic interfaces.



The Excavated Feature in Trench G. (Image: L. McCall, 2024).

My palpable disappointment was however assuaged as we finished excavating the feature. Beneath it sat a ninth century road surface, previously excavated in 1997. Revealing the road surface (see image below) for the first time was enormously gratifying, though it was deemed unethical when I began charging my peers to stand on it!



Ninth Century Road Surface! (Image: L. McCall, 2024).

Further, from a small collection of stones at the base of the feature, I excavated a hearth bottom (see image below); concrete evidence for pre-industrial metalworking, suggesting parallels between Govan and another important early-medieval site on Iona.

At Govan Old, much of the story remains untold, and the sarcophagus lid remains elusive.

Encouragingly it appears that below the modern deposits and disturbances there are extensive early medieval levels survive. Based on our reading of the excavations from the 1990s these levels should be contemporary with the Govan Stones and will be a major target in future seasons. The first hint of the richness of these deposits was the identification of an extensive area of ironworking. We will be hoping to get some good dating evidence for this activity in the coming season. Here we are arguably looking at the origins of a millennium long tradition which culminated in the great shipbuilding era. Now that we have a better understanding of the deposits, the potential significance of these early levels is magnified.

GRAVE YARD SURVEY

The probing survey initiated in 2022 made great progress and we have mapped about 35% of the churchyard. This survey continued to expose and record the buried stones with inscriptions both poignant and historically significant. These proved as fascinating to the volunteers and visitors as to the experts. Most of these stones date to between the 17th and 19th centuries, but in the course of these explorations two new examples of Govan Stones were discovered. One is a small fragment with the double-strand interlace characteristic of the 'Govan School' and another is a complete recumbent stone, similar to the ones on display in the church, but with the interlace almost completely effaced. The probing survey proved particularly popular with the volunteers.

Discovering the Stone Commemorating James and Isobel Murdoch at Govan Old

Fiona Loose (Senior Hons)

We got to participate in many archaeological methods at our time in Govan Old, however probing was my favourite. It was a satisfying process, from putting the first probe into the ground to recording and revealing the full story of the person's gravestone. There was one particular section that had everyone entranced; half of a gravestone had been found. There was extensive writing on the stone, and we were all hypothesising about what was missing on the other piece. To include another point identified in the probing survey, the section was extended to the right and the broken piece was found. Strangely, it was flipped upside down, and thus we could not identify whose gravestone it was. Anticipation clung to the air once we got the go ahead to flip the stone; all eyes were watching as the other side was connected like a jigsaw. We finished by recording and photographing the stone, feeling satisfied that we'd uncovered one of the older stones in the graveyard. The inscription revealed:

HEIR LYES IAMS MURDOCH OF CRAIGTON AND HIS WYFE ISOBEL STIN
WHOM DECEASED BOTH ON TE YEAR OF GOD 1686 HE ON THE 6 OF
DECEMBER AND SHE ON THE 14 OF OCTOBER HE IN AGE 57 SHE 59



The Stone Commemorating James Murdoch and His Wyfe (Image: D. Kovacova).

Ted On Top of the World and On Top of the Spoil Heap

Michael Hogg (Senior Hons)



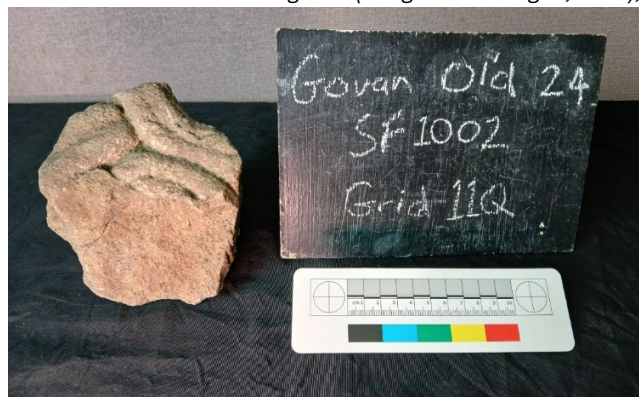
After choosing what probing flag to explore under, Ted discovered this cornerstone and worked on it during the afternoon. Ted, at the end of the day, giving us a thumbs up on top of the spoil heap. (Images: R. Flannigan, Ted's dad).

I had the pleasure of having Ted, an 8-year-old boy, and his dad, Rob, shadow me for a day in Grid 11Q, often referred to as ‘Michael’s Grid’ due to the many... many days I spent in there. Ted was raring to work with his Ted-sized bucket and Ted-sized trowel within moments of arriving on site. We started with probing to check for anything sturdy under the surface, placing flags where we (Ted) decided what deserved further inspection. Going against a methodical approach, Ted would point to a flag based on pure instinct to determine what to inspect; at this point, he was the boss. When digging below the second flag, Ted uncovered the find of the season: a piece of 9th-century stone with interlace decoration (Special Find 1002).

However, this brilliant start to this young archaeologist’s career did not stop with adding to the “The Govan School” of carved stones collection. Instead, immediately afterward he uncovered a cornerstone. Excavating around this, he familiarised himself with the trowel and did bucket runs to the spoil heap. He told me, as we revealed further finds surrounding the cornerstone, that he had wanted to be an archaeologist from the age of four, which, considering his age, is impressive. When it reached the point of mid-afternoon, the sun broke from behind the clouds. Despite the growing heat, Ted persevered with his sunscreen, and we got to work doing some site photography.



Ted was quick to learn how to photograph this site feature, with his very big handwriting just fitting on the chalkboard. It looks like I am shadowing him! (Image: R. Flannigan, 2024),



The piece of 9th-century stone interlace was found under the first patch of grass Ted deturfed. (Image: M. Hogg)

Some may say his dream has come true, but I think it is just the beginning of his bright future. Ted felt on top of the world, especially when he conquered the heights of the spoil heap!

Thank you, Ted, for your enthusiasm, hard work, and dedication. Keep working hard young man.

FIELD SCHOOL TRAINING and LEARNING

Over the years Govan has been an important training ground for students. Much of archaeological field teaching takes place at the trowel's edge and requires working closely with others, whether they are staff, professionals, fellow students or volunteers. Necessarily this education is contingent and ad hoc, depending as it does on what is found. This contingency opens up opportunities to influence the excavation process which have been taken by the current cohort. The importance of the teaching and learning which takes place between fellow students is nicely captured by Kristoffer Nass. This idea of taking charge of learning is behind the development of the site-specific field manual for Govan Old discussed by Emily Johnson which was a collective student effort. The current generation, represented here by Rob Ferro and Erin Brunt, are clearly best placed to explore the digital possibilities of aerial photography and the video diary format. By fostering a positive approach to learning we hope to create an inclusive and supportive environment for all those who participate in the archaeology.

The Best Way to Learn is to Teach

Kristoffer Naas (MSc)

Teaching others about the history of Govan and field archaeological methods is an important part of the work that takes place in Govan Old. The student volunteers have been an integral part of the project work over the last few years. As such, it was a given that the student team should be involved in the teaching. A peer-to-peer teaching and learning approach allowed the students, myself included, to grow more confident in our practical and teaching skills. Perhaps more importantly, I think, student teaching made the project more approachable to our fieldschool students and community volunteers alike. It created a more relaxed and informal learning environment, lowering the threshold for engagement and interaction with archaeology, the project, and Govan Old as a whole.

Through building on, and off, the existing expertise within the project team, the working dynamics encouraged, above anything else, a flexible learning environment which prioritises collaborative knowledge sharing. Collaborative is really the keyword here. It is what I have come to understand as a core part and central strength of what we do at Govan Old.

The effectiveness of peer-to-peer teaching is unmistakably reflected in the growing confidence and expertise of the 'core' team. It has left us with a group of incredibly dedicated and motivated volunteers who have and will continue to return to this project, year after year. This has at least been the case for myself. While I am no longer a student at the University of Glasgow, I plan to return to this project for as long as I can.



Peer-to-peer teaching in action (Image: Miller 2024).

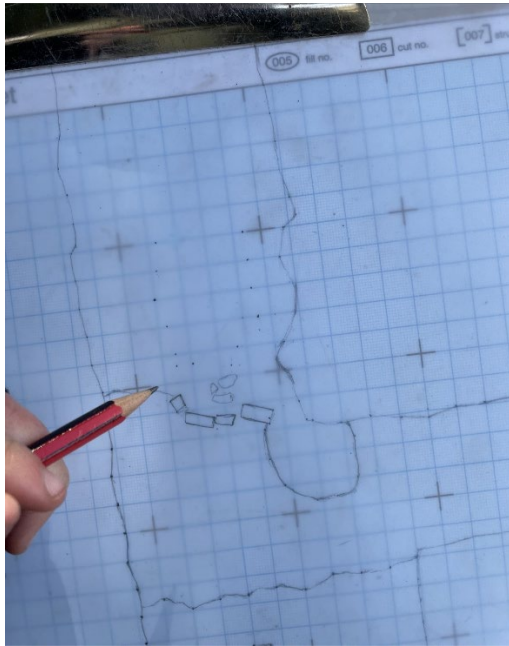
Using the Govan Old Archaeology Field Manual 2024

Emily G. Johnson (Junior Hons)

I was one of the undergraduate students on the dig, and the Govan Old Church was my first experience of fieldwork. Thanks to this, I found the GOA (Govan Old Archaeology) field manual immensely helpful and straightforward. I mainly used the guide on my phone, through which I had access to an on-line copy, occasionally I also made use of the physical copy on site.

Despite the details of the manual regarding the tools, I found it far more useful to be taught how to use the tools by other students and archaeologists. Moreover, as a hands-on learner, I found this true for most other parts of fieldwork. Personally, I found the field manual the most advantageous when learning how to do a plan drawing, something I found very daunting at the start. The field manual had lists of all the equipment I needed to use, and it had a lot of pictures for this section.

I also found the manual helpful when doing other paperwork, such as filling out context sheets. This was because it was clear how to fill in context sheets and it had a diagram identifying differing soil types, which I found very handy. Moreover, as someone who has dyslexia, I found the field manual accessible on the whole. Overall, I found using the manual easy and valuable to my experiences at Govan Old.



Govan Old Archaeology #7



Plan Drawing

Plan drawing records archaeological features **from above**. An accurate record of what we see is vital **for future use**.

YOU WILL NEED

- Planning frame
 - Plum bob
 - Pencil (4H - 6H)
 - Rubber
 - Grid paper
 - Permatrace
 - Drawing Board
 - Masking tape
 - Measuring tapes
- Using the Govan Old grid system, set up a **taut measuring tape** between two set grid points along the **edge of the area** to be drawn.
 - Lay the **inner edge** of the 1m by 1m planning frame on the fixed line and draw the included features to scale. **The drawing scale for plans is 1:20** (1cm on paper = 20cm on site).
 - Repeat for the whole area.

Symbols:	
△	soil sample
---	Edge of excavation [001] Structural
- - -	Internal excavation [002] Cut feature
---	Cut feature [002] deposit/fill
---	Context boundary
.....	Uncertain boundary
---	Base of cut
---	Section line
+	Level heights
+	grid
---	cut hatch
---	Slope hatch
---	Clay (solid)
---	Clay inclusion
---	Mortar
---	Ash
---	Shell
---	Timber
---	Bone
---	Ceramic sherd
---	Charcoal

Standard symbols for archaeological practice

Doing a Plan Drawing (Image: E.G. Johnson 2024) and GOA Plan Drawing, Page 1

Aerial Drone Photography and Photogrammetry at Govan Old

Rob A. Ferro (Junior Hons)



Aerial view of Govan Old showing the new bridge. (Image: R. Ferro).

I had the opportunity to do several drone missions during the Govan Old field school. It will never cease to amaze me how interesting an aerial perspective can be on site. My favourite missions were taking candid pictures of students laying out grids in the graveyard and being impressed at just how perfect the grids had been laid out!

The most important missions I flew with my drone were a series of aerial scans of the trench before it was backfilled, using photogrammetry to make an accurate 3D model of the trench, recording the trench in a more accessible way than site drawings and photographs. I used this 3D model to make a 1:100 scale 3D printed replica of the trench; the replica was left with the project's engagement material. Volunteers could hold the miniature replica of the trench, which helped explaining the site as a whole. This was also great for less mobile visitors that couldn't visit the trench edge. More importantly it allowed visitors and even volunteers on site to get a literal 'hands-on' feel of the trench.



Laying Out Grids. (Image: R. Ferro).

I hope that in future seasons I will be able to build up a running picture of how the trench has changed by making a series of 3D replicas. These replicas will allow future visitors to be able to appreciate how the dig has progressed from previous years.



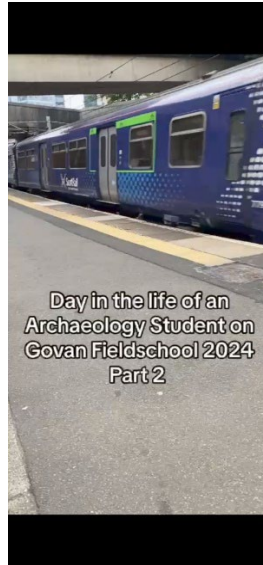
3D Model of the excavations and aerial view of Trench G. (Image: R. Ferro).

Digital Digging

Erin Brunt (Junior Hons)

During the Govan Old fieldschool, I created two “day in the life of an archaeologist” videos to share my experience and what I had learned, but my true motivation was to inspire and educate. The first video was short and engaging, offering a glimpse into daily tasks like excavating and showcasing my discoveries. Posted on the Glasgow University Archaeology Society Instagram page (https://www.instagram.com/reel/C_n8JlZKtB5/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link), it generated over 1,500 views and 111 likes, attracting attention from accounts like Harp Archaeology and Clyde Archaeology. The personal and accessible tone gave viewers a sense of being on-site, almost as if they were part of the dig. Sharing discoveries in real time added anticipation, sparking curiosity about what might be unearthed next.

The second video was longer and more detailed, offering a comprehensive look at the archaeological process. I showed tasks such as probing, deturfing, excavation, and recording data using context sheets, plan drawings, and site photography. This video was intended for viewers with a deeper interest in archaeology and demonstrated what I had learned during the dig. It provided a truthful and realistic portrayal of the discipline, showing that archaeology involves much more than just digging. The responses were overwhelmingly positive. People approached me with comments about how much they enjoyed the videos, and students who hadn’t attended the fieldschool said they now want to participate next year. These videos highlighted how social media can foster curiosity, encourage public engagement, and build an enthusiastic and supportive community around archaeology.



Part 2 of the “day in the life of an archaeologist”. (Video by E. Brunt, 2024).

HEALTH and WELL-BEING ON SITE

In recent years the idea that Archaeology is an activity that can contribute to positive health and well-being has been gratefully embraced by the heritage sector. While it may seem self-evident that undertaking a mixture of physical and intellectual tasks out of doors is good for you, archaeologists have generally been passive providers of well-being, rather than identifying specific needs. This is particularly true with respect to mental health, which is why these contributions by Moira Piazzoli, Michael Hogg and Bratajo Goswami showing students taking responsibility for their own mental health and of others are so welcome.

Wellbeing at Govan Old

Moira Piazzoli (MPhil) and Michael Hogg (Senior Hons)

This year’s community excavation and fieldschool saw the introduction of intentional wellbeing practices on site. This choice was motivated by archaeology’s recognised potential to positively impact participants’ wellbeing, as well as by an awareness of the challenges affecting workers in the sector. Our approach was inspired by conversations with staff, students and volunteers, and informed by ongoing PhD research by Megan Russell at the University of Bournemouth – particularly, by the wellbeing practices embedded in “The Sanctuary” experimental archaeology project.

The approach to wellbeing at Govan Old consisted of 3 main elements:

- * a wellbeing first-aid kit equipped with a range of first intervention and signposting resources around physical and mental health;*
- * a quiet space for decompressing;*
- * the presence of wellbeing coordinators on site, who keep an eye on participants’ mood and needs, and act as the first point of contact in case of any issues, which could also be raised anonymously.*

Our end-of-excavation survey collected markedly positive responses, with the vast majority of participants feeling welcomed, cared for and empowered to develop new archaeological skills. Beyond these immediate benefits for this year's participants, we hope to equip present and future archaeologists with the tools and skills to make positive change in the field, promoting a culture of mutual care that will outlive the fieldschool and current research projects.



The Quiet Space in the Baptistry with the Wellbeing Material Laid Out (Image: M. Piazzoli, 2024).

Kicking Out the Govan Blues

Bratajo Goswami (MSc)

The two-week fieldschool at Govan Old starting September 2024 invited participation from students of Archaeology – present and former – joined under one singular objective of exploring the mysteries of Govan Old. Perhaps a less fanciful rational dominated the minds of the participants, as this was a fieldschool designed to deliver core fieldwork experiences. Part of the bigger four weeks programme ‘Dig Where You Stand’, the fieldschool would have to be considered a success for it tackled three major (suspected) afflictions archaeologists suffer aimlessness, disconnection and fatigue.

Aimlessness: Motive is the driving factor behind taking on work. Each individual contends with their own motive(s) for participation. A dig, for stalwarts, is a place of devotion; for volunteers, a curio; and, for students, a place of learning. Constant with the learning outcome, every individual was offered a go at the tools at disposal – be it upending the earth with shovels, measuring depth with the dumpy, or scaling the 25m² grid down to a single A3 sheet. The possibility of numerous activities eliminated the chance of participants displaying non-teleological behaviour. In the end, everybody had something to do, for reasons only they themselves are privy to.

Disconnection: An emotional burnout is a phenomenon that many experience at some point. For archaeologists, long hours, manual work, and harsh environmental conditions can invite grind, and their passion run the risk of ebbing away. The nature of repetitive work forces individuals to lose purpose, compounded manifold if the work is remote, far away from human connections. The wellbeing coordinators at Govan Old attempted to combat this by organising

fieldwork that encouraged constant communication. At no point was a person left by their lonesome, except for by their own desire. The coordinators were available at all times prepared to answer queries and relieve individuals of their duties at the latter's request. The open yet compact workspace meant nobody would have to experience forced solitude. Ultimately, everyone accommodated everyone else.

Fatigue: Exhaustion is an age-old adversary for archaeologists. It limits the scope, potential, and the range of work. People will themselves against adversities by leave of their mental capacity, but physical limitations can only be overcome so much. It would be immodest to claim no such affliction affected the dig at Govan Old. What transpired, however, was the effective management of this fatigue. Congruent with the supervision of the wellbeing of participants, a safe place – a quiet place – was on offer for everyone and, in there, provisions for dietary requirements and medical supplies, with the odd assortment of sugary goodness which I, the author, acknowledge to have graciously sampled. Undoubtedly, the work at times was taxing and burdensome, however, not for long periods. Tea breaks were mandatory which came more often than not, and no contract bound participants to work beyond their capabilities.

In my personal experience, digging under the Georgian stone tabletop in Grid 16 invited all these emotions. The tabletop was, without doubt, impressive. As were the (suspected) pre-mediaeval stone tablets atop of which the plinth rested. What was more impressive was the resilience my cohort showed to overcome these moments of aimlessness, disconnection or fatigue as they dug their way underneath. I believe every participant would concede to have experienced each of these afflictions and, thereafter, found an outlet to combat them, thanks, in no small amount, to the effective management by both the supervisors and the coordinators (who shall not be named to avoid the appearance of favouritism). The fieldschool was a success because every individual recognised their role and delivered what was expected. Even the unexpected has its own story to tell, however, that will be for another day.



The aforementioned stone tabletop, dated to the Georgian period. The present turf overgrowth belies the depth dug into during the fieldschool. (Image: S. Miller, 2024).

VOLUNTEERING

The Govan Stones is largely staffed by volunteers going back the first guides, the Friends of Govan Old, organised by the minister in the early 1990s. Apart from cost considerations, we have learned from the volunteers that can be a powerful tool to build interest and attract expertise. The opening of the Riverside Museum and associated public realm works in Govan provoked a ‘nothing about us without us is for us’ reaction, that is reflected in the public art introduced at the time and is reflected in the attitude to volunteering that has developed.

The composition of the volunteers has changed since Govan Old ceased to be the parish church (2007) and has attracted a range of volunteers from beyond the parish, at all stages of life, possessing great faith and none. The volunteers bring a rich range of expertise from that of a distinguished Scottish medieval historian to the students just beginning their educational journey such as the volunteer who went on to do a PhD on the Govan Stones.

The two pieces below allow you to appreciate how volunteering at Govan Old has become more diverse and inclusive Dee Kovacova currently a student of archaeology is also a Govan Stones guide, while Luke Alexander, a recent archaeology graduate is a Southside native is a volunteer guide too.

Excavation and Volunteering at Govan Old

Dee Kovacova (Junior Hons)



Opening of the Govan-Partick Bridge (Image D. Kovacova 2024)

Besides studying archaeology at the University of Glasgow, I am also a volunteer guide at Govan Old. I was delighted to spend a substantial part of the 2024 dig with the ongoing churchyard survey: probing, revealing, cleaning, and recording monuments. My experience with the probing survey and the excavations in Trench G allowed me to spend the Govan-Partick Footbridge

Festival, which had a record-breaking attendance, showing the visitors around the excavation. Here, I explained to visitors what we were doing and why, connecting the ongoing excavations to the monuments they could see inside the church. I especially enjoyed seeing the Govan Old guides join forces with the excavation team. As the survey revealed the monuments and details of inscriptions, the volunteers were immediately looking up more details about the lives of the people buried there. This further research allowed us to share these long-forgotten stories with many visitors, often within just hours of cleaning up the burial marker or plot marker.

The dig provided an invaluable experience as it allowed me to develop skills in archaeology while connecting with the monuments in the churchyard. This experience has helped me to provide a better experience for Govan Old visitors, whether local or travelling from far away. It feels very rewarding to uncover some of the long-forgotten details of the church, the churchyard, the monuments within, and the lives of people from the Govan Parish, and ensuring they can be remembered long into the future.



The Burnseed Memorial After Cleaning (Images D. Kovacova 2024).

Reflections of a Volunteer and Archaeologist

Luke Alexander (Graduate Volunteer)

2024 was my second year of archaeological work at Govan Old. This season however saw an increase in the number of student archaeologists, community volunteers and church guides on site. Having graduated from university with a degree in archaeology and having been a volunteer at Govan Old for close to two years, I was in a unique position to both advise and understand the benefits of the volunteer staff at Govan Old. This allowed my fellow volunteers and I to take a much deeper look at the history of Govan Old. Gaining hands-on experience with the material culture allowed all of us to increase our knowledge of the site and enhance the stories we tell. I particularly enjoyed being part of the excavations in Trench G. I handled and cleaned finds that were uncovered from the trench and finds which were recovered by the probing teams who were deployed to help locate more of Govan's long-lost stories.



Trench G Southeast Facing. (Image: L. Alexander 2024).

My experience of working more closely with the archaeology team really helped me bring Govan to life for the thousands of visitors, both on the opening day of the new bridge between Govan and the Riverside Museum and subsequently. The volume of visitors to Govan Old has almost tripled due to the bridge opening and this year's excavations, with daily numbers jumping from around 40 to over 130. Overall, this experience was of huge benefit not only to the students and staff at the University of Glasgow and Clyde Archaeology, but also the volunteers who used this as a great learning experience to better their understanding of the stories of Govan Old.



Volunteers and Archaeologists Working Side by Side (Image: Clyde Archaeology 2024).

The plan is to continue these excavations in coming years to allow us to fully explore the early medieval deposits and the structures associated with the original entrance. Alongside it we will continue with the probing survey until the churchyard is completely mapped. Given the level of enthusiasm for the project from GU students and the encouraging response to the *Dig Where You Stand* initiative, we may be able to achieve more than we had dared to hope.

Acknowledgements

The scale of the archaeology work at Govan Old has increased year on year since the pandemic and this would not have been possible without the support of too many university colleagues to name. I particularly must thank Dave Sneddon of Clyde Archaeology for removing so much of the tension and for providing excavation master classes every day. Over the past three years Dr Kathleen Clifford has constructed a finds processing system from first principles that educates students, informs the public and keeps track of everything. Finally, the project has been greatly enriched by Stephen Miller, who has provided the organisational glue and unbridled enthusiasm behind the mobilisation of the many highly motivated students who are doing the actual work.



Drawing by Moira Piazzoli