

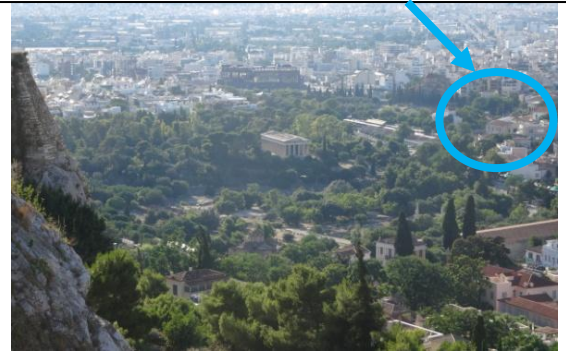
The view of the Agora from the Acropolis – the current excavations are at the right of the picture.

## MARYLEBONE GETS ARCHAEOLOGICAL IN ATHENS!!!



First morning at our home in Athens for two weeks!

For two weeks at the end of the summer term five Year 13 students and I excavated in the Agora, the city centre of Ancient Athens, situated right under the Acropolis. This area is the equivalent of a combination of the Houses of Parliament, Trafalgar Square, Westminster Abbey, the Courts of Justice and Camden Market. It was the legal, commercial, social, political (it was the birth place of Democracy, and evidence has been found of ancient ballots and systems of voting), and religious centre of Athens, with its greatest peak around 500-400BC. The excavations have been going since 1931 and are run by the American School of Classical Studies, and we were part of a team of about 40 American students who were out there for 8 weeks to excavate. The current main focus of the excavations is a trench to uncover a building called the Painted Stoa, which was a social area and where the Stoic Philosophers first originated.



Still smiling at the end of a long, hard day!

The five students were: Alicia Poultney, Anna Maria Barona, Megan Wilson, Oliver Joncus and Tilly Shoul. All students are going on to university to do subjects related to Classics or Archaeology, so this was the ultimate extra-curricular experience for their degrees! This excavation was once referred to by an Oxford professor as the “Rolls-Royce of Digs”!

The Director of the Excavations, Professor John Camp, allocated us on our first day to a trench called BΘ, and to a fantastic Supervisor called Daniele, who was extremely impressed by the enthusiasm, energy and focus with which our students worked. Our “working day” started at exactly 7am, indicated by the church bell, when we had to actually start work. This meant arriving at the site by 6:55 at the very latest in order to get the best tools for the day and be in place to start on time. We would work until 9am, when the sound of the church bell would indicate “cookie time” – our lifeline between then and lunch two hours later. If you happened to be working in mud they would put the biscuit in your mouth for you, as if you were a baby bird being fed by its mother. The sun would have hit some sections of the trench by now and the heat level started to rise. But we carried on regardless until the welcome sound of the bell at 11am for our half-hour lunch break. After lunch the heat began to get harder to work in, and then combine the heat with the



Sweeping!



Pottery Washing!



Digging!



Sorting through mud from a storage jar!





Finding part of an animal's jaw!

dust and the sun cream, and you have a rather unpleasant mixture! We would stop for a 15-minute "water break" at 1pm, then finish our day as soon as the bell rang at 2pm. It was a long, tough day, and I was very impressed by the

resilience of the Marylebone students. They were brilliant and still smiling by the end of the day!



Our trench – BΘ

Despite the hard physical work, the dirt, the heat and the tiredness, excavating was extremely rewarding and exhilarating. We never knew if we would find something exciting or unusual or note-worthy. We found tons of small pieces of pottery, but also bits of bones, handles of pots, a bronze coin; someone in our trench even found a small piece of gold. One object that I particularly enjoyed finding was a loom weight, used by women and slaves when weaving – it was such a simple piece, yet it was domestic and had been used by a woman my age almost 1000 years ago. Most of what we found here was from the Late Byzantine Period (around 1200 AD). I

ended up in another trench for a few days and had the opportunity to dig in a well from the Geometric Period (around 800 – 700 BC), and an area from the Classical Period (around 500 – 400 BC).



At Epidauros!

Other aspects of our trip included a trip to the ancient theatre of Epidauros to see Euripides' Trojan Women, which was an incredible performance. The performance was in Modern Greek, with English subtitles, so luckily we were able to understand what was happening. It was an extremely tragic play and the emotion expressed by the actors was phenomenal – there were times where we didn't need to read the subtitles, we knew what they were feeling. We also visited the island of Aegina for a day to see the Temple of Aphaea and swim. The hospitality we received on this island was wonderful. We also visited the Acropolis one evening and were treated to a tour of the whole Agora by Professor Camp, accompanied by Rex, the Agora dog! We also were invited with the other students to a pool party at the American Ambassador's house in Athens – a new experience for all of us!



The view back towards Athens from the Temple of Aphaea on Aegina

It was an amazing trip and the students on the trip were the best group of students I have ever travelled with. They threw themselves into the whole experience and were absolutely fantastic! One of the students summed up the experience of excavating perfectly: "What makes it so exciting is that you are the first person to see and touch that object/piece of pottery since someone dropped it there all those years ago!" We were literally getting in touch with the past – and it was an incredible experience and opportunity that none of us will forget! I am extremely grateful to the Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies for the funding they provided us with, which paid for our trips to Aegina and to Epidauros – both experiences would not have been possible without this funding, and the students (three of whom are keen performers) enjoyed the production of Trojan Women at Epidauros immensely.



Enjoying the sunset at the port on Aegina!

Anna Bell, Head of Classics/Latin