

Smithsonian Folklife Festival 2007

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In the summer of 2007, Canterbury Archaeological Trust spent two weeks participating in America's largest cultural event, the annual Smithsonian Folklife Festival, held on the National Mall in Washington DC. Forty local people illustrated Kent's rich cultural heritage alongside 80 Virginians at the festival's 'Roots of Virginia Culture' programme to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the establishment of Jamestown, Virginia, widely regarded as the first permanent English settlement of what would become the United States of America.

The Festival is a free event and has been an annual production of the Smithsonian Institution's Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage since 1967. At its inception, the Festival was *'conceived as a vehicle for cultural conversation and a means of cultural conservation... The Festival itself is the most visible part of a larger effort by the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage to safeguard cultural traditions... so they can flourish in a contemporary world'* (from **2007 Smithsonian Folklife Festival**, Smithsonian Institution Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, 2007). It is always held around the 4th July and provides a forum where Americans and other peoples from nations around the globe can come together to demonstrate and perform their cultural traditions.

The 2007 Festival was composed of three themes, each theme representing groups of peoples who have contributed to the making of America's history. Each theme occupied a 'zone' of the National Mall which stretches between the Washington Monument at one end to the US Capitol at the other (a distance just short of one mile). Over the ten day period 1.6 million vis-

itors strolled along the Mall, in and out of the marquees and lingering by the open air stages, taking in everything the Festival had to offer.

The **'Mekong River: Connecting Cultures'** zone had participants who had travelled from Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and the Chinese province of Yunnan – some making long journeys from remote villages. Their programme included Vietnamese opera, Thai puppetry, Cambodian classical dance and crafts such as ceramics production, wood working and speciality foods.

'Northern Ireland at the Smithsonian' programme included demonstrations of arts and crafts such as mural painting and lace making together with story tellers, musicians and cooks.

The **'Roots of Virginia Culture'** zone had participants from Virginia's Native American tribes, West Africa and Kent, England. The demonstrations and performances here involved blues and gospel singers, blacksmiths, boat builders, fruit growers, pottery makers together with other crafts and traditions. The archaeological activities from the Americans and ourselves focused on recreating aspects of America's earliest history.

This was the first time that England has been represented at the Festival and the previous three years had seen researchers from the Smithsonian Institution working with Kent County Council to identify individuals and groups who could illustrate various aspects of our culture and inform Festival visitors about attractions they can expect from a trip to Kent. Canterbury Archaeological Trust was invited to contribute to the theme of Recreating the Past in the 'Roots of Virginia' programme.



■ Fig. 1 Festival visitors explore Canterbury's Little Dig ('Roots of Virginia Culture')



■ Fig. 2 A basket weaver from Virginia ('Roots of Virginia Culture')

We (Marion Green, Education Officer and Enid Allison, Environmental Archaeologist and Education Service support) delivered a package designed to attract both adults and young people and over nine hundred children and thousands of adults took part in the activity over the ten days. The Festival attracts considerable media coverage and we were filmed and interviewed by local FOX News and by KCC and BBC Radio Kent.

For children, our **Little Dig** involved excavating and identifying parts of reconstructed buildings and real archaeological finds in two 'trenches' built by the Smithsonian's Tech Crew (many thanks to Jen, Matt and Greg) to CAT's specification. Each 'Little Dig'

was intended to represent a Kent excavation trench and was a metre square box with archaeological features (walls and floors) built into the structure. Sherds of pottery, animal bones, brick and tile fragments were buried in layers of sand until nothing was visible. Children in small teams then 'excavated' the layers with trowels, brushes and hand shovels. Starting at the top they worked down, removing the objects as they found them and placing them in special trays. They took their finds to reference tables to identify them.

The idea was originally brought to Canterbury by the Museum of London Archaeological Service during our Whitefriars excavations when we used it as a 'Roman' activity. The original



■ Fig. 3 Certificate received by participants in 'The Little Dig'



■ Fig. 4 Young 'archaeologists' identify their finds from Canterbury's Little Dig ('Roots of Virginia Culture')



■ Fig. 5 The reference display for Canterbury's Little Dig activity ('Roots of Virginia Culture')



■ Fig. 6 A Cambodian potter demonstrates her craft ('Mekong River: Connecting Cultures')

strategy was adapted for the 'Roots of Virginia' theme of the Festival. American children learn about the English settlement of Jamestown in school and many of the young visitors had been on trips to the archaeological site of Historic Jamestowne. So the top 'layer' had 17th century pottery fragments found on Kent excavations – pieces of the same kind of domestic jugs and jars the English settlers took with them when they sailed across the Atlantic in 1607, eventually to become lost in the Virginian soils and discovered by American archaeologists some 400 years later.

Kent's archaeology goes a lot deeper of course and the Little Dig had a medieval and a Roman layer as well – more than enough for little diggers to take in!

The reference tables had complete objects to help identification - all from Kent excavations and specially shipped over for the Festival. Many of the children came expecting to find dinosaurs but gained some experience of Archaeology - and a great certificate.

The reference collection plus photographs, reconstruction images and a running powerpoint presentation of '30 Years of Canterbury Archaeological Trust' also served as a stand alone display for adult visitors. There were conversations with people who had been to Britain as tourists or had relations here. Some people had been on training digs and others wanted to know about places they could visit in Canterbury and Kent. Although we were not allowed to give out flyers, we did have posters publicising Canterbury, Dover and Maidstone museums

Several people with education, archaeology and anthropology interests made themselves known to us and the Little Dig trenches have now gone to the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History where

they will be used for public education programmes in the Discovery Room, following the CAT example.

Sharing the 'Historic Archaeology' marquee with us was Amanda Danning, a facial reconstruction artist from Texas working on the skull of a 15 year old boy believed to be one of the first English settlers of Jamestown. Day by day we saw the features take shape. Alongside Amanda were people from Historic Jamestowne, the educational visitor centre at the original site of the James Fort, featured on a Time Team special in the UK earlier in 2007. Historic Jamestowne is owned and managed by a partnership of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities and the National Park Service. It plays a key role in the preservation, protection and promotion of the original site of the James Fort (www.historicjamestowne.org). The visitor centre was promoted at the Festival with displays and pottery puzzles for children – reconstructing copies of two dimensional Jamestowne period vessels using magnetic 'sherds' on a table top.

We had some great volunteers to help with re-instating the 'digs' throughout the day, chatting to the visitors and making lemonade runs. The weather was hot and steamy when we arrived and the day we left the temperature hit 37.8 °C, but in between was mostly in the low 26-28 °C and the locals said it was like April weather. Enid and I were kept very busy on site. Working daily with a constantly changing audience (and episodes of song, dance and storytelling on a nearby stage!) was demanding stuff, but we definitely rose to the challenge and the American visitors really appreciated our contribution and that we had brought original things of such antiquity for them to see and handle.

We found occasions to see what other participants in the

Festival were doing. There was some great bluegrass music from the Virginians and every evening there were extra performances. The music even carried on back at the hotel where the participants stayed together. I could have spent a long time watching the Mekong River potters! It was very therapeutic watching them effortlessly turn out pot after pot – small lamps, bowls, 'bun trays' and stew pots. Had it been possible I would have loved to bring one back with me. We also had two days break when we took in Washington's key sites and the free Smithsonian museums lining the mall – with air con.

This was a successful and enjoyable venture and I would like to thank both the Smithsonian Institution and KCC's Smithsonian Project team for this opportunity to share knowledge and experience with so many people and promote in particular, the work of the Canterbury Archaeological Trust. For pictures of our Washington trip go to our website at www.canterbury-trust.co.uk

Summary

Le « Trust » archéologique de Canterbury en association avec d'autres représentants du Kent ont présenté le patrimoine culturel du Kent au Festival folklorique de Smithsonian. Avec des membres des tribus natives américaines de Virginie et d'Afrique de l'Ouest, ils ont participé au programme « Les racines de la Culture en Virginie », visant à restituer des aspects de l'histoire précoce des Amériques.

Die Archäologische Stiftung Canterbury präsentierte das Kulturerbe der südostenglischen Region Kent zusammen mit weiteren Organisationen aus Kent auf dem Smithsonian Folklore Festival in Virginia, USA. Die Stiftung nahm zusammen mit Vertretern von indianischen Stämmen aus Virginia und mit Organisationen aus Westafrika am Programm „Die kulturellen Wurzeln Virginias“ teil, bei welchem Aspekte der frühen amerikanischen Geschichte vorgestellt und wiederbelebt wurden.