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## GriffithsInterview-transcription

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**Chelsi:** Hi and welcome to the women in archaeology podcast, a podcast about for and by women in the field. My name is Chelsi Slotten and I'm your host for the episode. Today we're joined by Dorothy Griffiths, a Caribbean archaeologist who focus' on post-medieval ceramics. We're also joined by Kirsten Lopez. Thanks so much for being on the show today everyone.

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**Dorothy:** Thank you.

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**Kirsten:** Of course,

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**Dorothy:** I'm happy to be here.

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**Chelsi:** Perfect. So Dorothy, I know that we've been emailing back and forth a little bit and I just have to say I'm super excited to have you on the show to share your experiences with us. So since listeners haven't benefited from getting to talk to you or getting to email you can use give us a quick introduction into who you are. And what kind of archaeology you're interested in?

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**Dorothy:** Okay. I am Dorothy Griffiths formerly from Kingston Jamaica. Now living in Brooklyn, New York. I started archaeology. In the late 90s after switching from being a teacher. So my first program of studies was at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica where I did my BA in history and archaeology and then I went to the UK where I did a post graduate degree in post excavation studies. So I studied in the UK for four years and I worked as an archaeologist for nine years.

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**Chelsi:** Okay. So you've had some good experience both doing archaeology and education. Can tell us a little bit about like why you wanted to be an archaeologist or what motivated you to get into the field of archaeology?

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**Dorothy:** Getting into actual energy is rather interesting kind of weird, but interesting. When I went to the University of the West Indies, I started out doing social sciences and general history like West African history, West Indian history, and somehow I encountered a friend of mine who figured that I would be best suited doing archaeology. Now the only place I saw archaeology was on TV when they would talk about Egypt. And stuff like that, and so that's how it never crossed my mind; but when my friend said, you know, he was doing it and he just figured that it would suit me, I just jumped at it. And so my major became very broad base. I did social science courses, but my major then became archaeology and it was really fascinating learning all these new things, you know about evolution and learning more about my country because I believe when I started archaeology that's when I realized the depth of Jamaica's history, and the history of the of the Caribbean, and other countries outside of the Caribbean.

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**Chelsi:** I think that's a really important thing to talk about because I've done training in the US as well as in the UK--and obviously everyone has their own specialties. I don't actually know that much about archaeology in Jamaica and Kirsten, I don't know kind of what your background is on archaeology in Jamaica or really anywhere in the Caribbean.

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**Kirsten:** I don't really have any experience in that area of the world. I've been interested in studying some of the islands, but I've never actually landed out there to study it. So that's kind of where I'm at. I am vaguely familiar with the Taino and some of the stuff that went on in Puerto Rico and Hispaniola, but Jamaica is a whole other different large island that I'm not really that familiar with as far as the deeper history. So Dorothy, do you mind educating us a little bit about it?

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**Dorothy:** Oh yes, I would love to! Jamaica's history spans for cultures. We have the Taino or the first people then we had the Spanish. We had the Africans and English if I'm not saying them in the order, you know towards the end do forgive me, but and thereafter through the plantation system we had other groups that came like the East Indians the Chinese and the Jews but where we stand in terms of the richness of the culture when we go out to do our excavations what stands out are artifacts from the Taino period the Spanish, and the European or the English I should say so that is what brought me so much into being fascinated by Jamaica's archaeology because of the extent of those artifacts that will churn up when we go out to excavate as it relates to the Tainos. We would encounter in some instances in some of parishes across Jamaica Taino burials from such areas. We would have a lot of pottery. Pottery that spoke to earthenware related to whether burial or cooking; where we would also come upon religious items like pieces

of Zemis. Is that what the Taino gods. As it as it relates to the African side of things we would also find a lot of pottery. So that is what we would see a lot in our excavations. When we were called in for rescue archaeology, because most of our projects focused on that. So, there might be construction in progress, or a road is going to be built and in the process after the land has been cleared of forests. The forest, I really mean like trees and so on, and sometimes structures in that process things are found on the surface. And so, this is how we get a clear or better understanding of the extent to which Jamaica's history spans. So on such as site we may encounter three different wars: that of the Taino, the Spanish, and most definitely the English for example, if our excavation takes us to a historical site where there's a great house, it's likely that our a lot of artifacts would turn up and from that as I stated we get a better understanding of Jamaica's history and then that forces us or prompts us to do some historical investigation. So our team was a very unique team at the Jamaican National Heritage shops, the archaeologists that were within that organization many of us were teachers. And teachers of geography and history and social studies. So, we had that background that further aided us in understanding what we were encountering whenever we were called to a site to do any kind of rescue operation.

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**Chelsi:** Well, and I know one thing we've talked a lot about on the show is the importance of doing archaeology not just for archaeology sake, but for the public, and doing public outreach. It sounds like having a team full of educators might be a really great way of engaging that. Is there a big kind of push towards public engagement with archaeology in Jamaica?

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**Dorothy:** Sadly, there isn't. So like many places and yeah, we were so saddened by this because we were educators. That's the thing; I think when we came come on board, and by we, I mean my colleagues who many of them started at teacher's college with me others, we met along the way when we went to University. So, when we became a part of that organization, we realized that they were a lot of gaps. So, many of the things that were put in place, we were actually instrumental in doing that. For example, you asked about the whole idea of educating. We would liaise with our head office where they had an education department. We would encourage them to write on excavations that we undertake and that was very slow in coming about. As a unit we spearheaded going into the rural areas and into the schools. We called Archaeological Tours. So, what I would do I would go in the rural areas where there's a lot of rich history and I would go in the schools. I would ask the students on what they knew about archaeology, and many of them had no clue. Then that was an ethos of our job; reaching the young ones first so that they pass this knowledge on to their grandparents. I would present to them the idea as, "have you ever gone in the field with Grandpa? where grandpa is digging, you see this weird-looking stuffs

coming up like some glass bottles that are dark or some pottery, you know? Or that you see grandma having a cabinet that nobody's allowed to use until Christmas time." And when I say such things their eyes would spark as they would get excited and everybody wants to tell me. Yes. Yes. So that was the mode that we as archaeologists used to get the people involved. Are we started with the kids worldwide or Nationwide? Not so much. We have a Ministry of culture, and we were trying to get them on board to understand that they need the people to be sensitized. So that in this way, we can preserve our heritage more and make people more knowledgeable. Like the tourists! As it is, they get to know more about Jamaica than we do, and so they would come and see, and take away some of the artifacts. Yeah. Yeah. Many sold to them ignorantly. And then we lose a portion of our heritage and culture due to ignorance. So as you have at, not much education is being done.

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**Chelsi:** Yeah unfortunately. And Kirsten, did you have something you wanted to say?

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**Kirsten:** Not necessarily. I think that is a challenge in a lot of places. Although I think with the tourism angle that is something that is unique to Jamaica and other locations that have a really heavy tourism. It's the base of the economy there. There's a lot of tourism and the archaeology is very vulnerable to intensive looting and sales of "authentic" anything, and the looters, they don't really know what it is they are looting. Even if they know that it's very old, like you were saying Dorothy, people don't have an attachment any sort of real idea or deeper feeling that it's part of their heritage. When people gain an attachment to it, as far as owning it as theirs and with pride that it is of their home place, than that helps really give people a respect and an ownership over their heritage, including physical heritage, and a desire to preserve it. So that's really cool work that you had been doing down there.

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**Dorothy:** If I make another point on the point of Education. I found something rather interesting when I returned from the UK in 2001 after doing my masters and I couldn't get back to my job of archaeology immediately. I began going back into the schools to find employment as a teacher. Where many--we talked about ignorance-- of the people being ignorant even those at the very top many persons or many principles or leaders in organizations. When they looked at my resume, they said so what are we gonna do with archaeology? "In your resume I noticed you have archaeology. What are we gonna do with it?" I was stunned that they were saying that. I'm thinking are they saying that to me because I'm female, or this is just sheer ignorance. And I beat that weird thought. How did I beat that? I went to a particular school for an interview for a teacher of English and believe you me, when the principle saw archaeology her eyes popped

open. She was excited. She began running around the office and showing people my resume. "Wow. Guess what? We have an archaeologist coming on board. Oh, my goodness. I'm gonna try my best not to lose you." I had only gone for a temporary job. Somebody had gone off on maternity leave and I came in to fill that position for four months. That principal went to the social studies teacher and she bragged about me. She told the social studies teachers that she should make sure that she utilized my services as an archaeologist.

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**Chelsi:** Yeah, it was really interesting you mentioned going in and to people and them saying like what are we going to do with archaeology? Because that's a question that I often faced, and we've actually talked about on the podcast before. Undergrads who are getting a degree in anthropology, whether or not they specialize in archaeology or not, parents and friends are like, "what is what is anthropology where you going to do with that?" Or if they think of archaeology, they think of Indiana Jones or Lara Croft. That's glorified tomb raiding, it's not really archaeology. And I think something that archaeologists could do, to your point about education, is get out there and not just teach people about the history on the islands and getting people engaged with the past and that connected sense of community, but also teaching people why Archaeology is important and what it has to offer.

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**Kirsten:** One of the things too as far as teaching, and this is something I've had conversations about with others, is that archaeology is one of the most diverse disciplines. Considering the perspective angles and sub-disciplines, and all the bits of knowledge that are required to do it. Everyone then also has their specializations: here you have the hard sciences, you have the social sciences, you have literature and history, all combined. You could even throw philosophy in there depending on the type of archaeology you do. So there's so many ways that you can do archaeology and it's nice to hear that that's something that you were able to exploit in getting a job and were able to find someone that saw that in you.

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**Chelsi:** Kirsten, that's actually a really good segue. We are approaching the 20-minute mark for our break. When we come back, we'll hear more from Dorothy about her experiences in the archaeological community.

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**Chelsi:** Hey everyone, and welcome back to the women in our daily podcast so far on today's episode. We've been talking with Dorothy Griffiths a female archaeologist who works with post-medieval Ceramics. Actually. The reason Dorothy got in touch with us is because she was

interested in talking about her experience at a recent conference in London. That was kind of inspiring but also brought some diversity questions to her attention. Dorothy, if you want to jump in and explain a little bit about the conference that you attended, and what was good and what you noted.

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**Dorothy:** Okay, so in March of this year, I attended a conference that was being put on by Current Archaeology. Archaeology Live 2019. It was quite fascinating. Apart from the fact that it was held in London where I never had a chance to go to and it was being held at a prestigious university. I was impressed with the outline of all the sessions for the day and despite the conference focused more a lot on burial archaeology. There were aspects that really fascinated me and gave me an opportunity to interface with various people from various backgrounds and skill sets in archaeology. One of the presentations, or two of the presentations that stood out for me. One of such was done by Dr. Margarita Bieber from University of Cambridge. She spoke on, You Are What You Wear: Archaeological Textiles and What We Can Learn From Them.

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**Chelsi:** That's Kirsten's Avenue right there.

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**Kirsten:** Yep. I do textile analysis, well chemical analysis on textiles.

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**Dorothy:** Oh wow, okay!

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**Kirsten:** So yeah tell me a little more about it.

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**Chelsi:** So I think it just bow out here a little bit and Kirsten if you I like nerd out for the next five minutes? (giggles)

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**Kirsten:** (giggles) Totally.

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**Dorothy:** Yeah, so that's your area of specialization, Kirsten?

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**Kirsten:** Yeah.

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**Dorothy:** Oh, Interesting! I in all my um... What should I say? Cuz I have a I don't want to pretend as if I've sat at many tables, you know, at many conferences but so far, all the knowledge I have been garnering or gathering from archaeological settings. I have never yet come up on anyone who speaks of this type of archaeology. I don't know what category you would put it in whether your call it in environmental archaeology. Am I right Kirsten?

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**Kirsten:** Right, that's part of it. Environment has a big influence, but the specialization is referred to often as fiber/perishables. Textiles and related implements and other things that generally don't preserve fit into this general category. There are people that specialize in just like Peruvian textiles or Egyptian textiles and I'm sort of a larger generalist when it comes to textiles. So it's a very small field in the number of people that actually study it. I am actually familiar with her work. There was a publication that came out of the presentation that she did, but I haven't read it. Can you tell us a little bit about that presentation?

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**Dorothy:** From my little knowledge, because I like I'm trying to locate my notebook where I made my jottings; but from the top of my head, what fascinated me was the fact that they were able to, she was able to find in her excavations, evidence of these textiles. To the point that she was able to write on it that really fascinated me and they're the type of the different variety of materials that were found. You know, it had its it took me back to my time when I was studying Library science and we would talk about how books were made and the type of material. The things she presented about the type of material and where they came from. As she looked at the artifacts that were recovered in terms of textile and how they were used and who wore what. That really fascinated me and the whole delicacy of working with artifacts such as this type that that she came upon which was more prehistoric Mediterranean and Middle East and near East artifacts you know, it was really fascinating. Other area that also drew my attention, which I'm also biased on because it reminded me of my studies in library science, was looking at writing materials. This was done by Professor Hella Eckhardt. I hope I'm not mispronouncing her name, she was from the University of Reading. She presentation was on Writing and Power in the Roman world: literacies and material culture. That you know, made me think back on my skill set and my knowledge in library where we will look at the stylus pen. You know, she in her presentation, she looked at ink the different types of writing tools and who used it, and the different class of people who actually use these writing materials and so on so that was really fascinating for me and held my attention, you know?

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**Chelsi:** Yeah, well that sounds really interesting.

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**Chelsi:** Yeah, so Dorothy and some of the emails that we've had, you noted, that there was a kind of an interesting gender breakdown? In terms of who is attending the conference and some you notice. There was some diversity?

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**Dorothy:** Yes. I was fascinated by the fact that we had a proliferation of woman and all the woman at that conference. And even in terms of presentation that women and men were almost an equal terms. They weren't men with PhD status more than women there, was it was basically equal and that really fascinated me and made me realize that as it relates to some professional careers, there is no one gender that is dominating and I'm more fascinated that in archaeology, which is not a popular area of career path, that woman are just as present and outspoken as men. You know, women are doing as much dirty work! We are not afraid of getting dirt in our nails and getting on our knees down on rough tough surfaces, you know, I was really fascinated by that. What worried me a bit though was I didn't see more of people of you know, African descent, or of my own race that that bothered me a bit, you know and being from Jamaica which is out of many one people. There isn't a balance there either, because you know we're out of many one people, and in our own organization mostly if not everybody was of the same race; that's of African descent. where we had any change or a difference it would be people who are visiting from University of Florida who would be coming in to do research studies. So back to the conference. I was really fascinated, and you know, I would love to see more of my people or people of African descent who specialize in various areas and fields in archaeology to be part of the whole process.

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**Chelsi:** Yeah, definitely are there things that you think archaeology could do better to help interest in and retain, you know persons of color?

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**Dorothy:** I think it has to do with education. If there is an interfacing of the universities with the with the elementary schools, then I believe that we will sensitize young people. as to different parts of of career endeavors. I think that's where it begins. You know, I am a computers are taking over basically, and most of the jobs are I think I'm more inclined in that direction, but I think the onus is on universities to lie more with the primary institutions of education to let the

young people know that in terms of pursuing career Endeavors, they can look outside of the box, you know. Yeah for the females is this, you know, it's a far cry from thinking that we can as females still just pursue nursing and teaching. There are careers that are as rewarding, you know? There are many women now as engineers, as lawyer; some of those careers that we would consider more male dominated. I see no problem or nothing to stop more women are more females especially

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**Dorothy:** of my race and ethnicity to enter into the field of archaeology. When I when I went to University of Leicester. I was the only African American or black Carribean person was in my department as a postgraduate student, you know.

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**Chelsi:** That's really kind of kind of telling right? Because one of the things that archaeology has talked about a lot even if it maybe doesn't always do the best job putting its money where its mouth is, is the fact that differing opinions can be can be very valid right and very important because they provide different perspectives on the past, you know, and we have the material that we have is we can interpret it. You know the way that we think is the best but the way that I interpret it may not be the same way as Kirsten interpret it's may not be the same way as Dorothy interpreted as may not be the same way as I or someone else does and that that that interpretation is impacted by our lived experiences, and our biases and they can't really get it the truth and understand like the potential that the past has to show us. It's really important to consider all of the possibilities and the best way of doing that is by having a really diverse population engaged in archaeology.

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**Dorothy:** Yeah, that's true. Even in one of the presentations that can't remember specifically can't find my booklet that I had originally where I had made a note where there was a presentation that was done on the I don't remember I don't want to quote it incorrectly one of those medieval periods where one of the excavations revealed that an African person was found in one of the discoveries and I found that to be very fascinating being the only black person in that audience. I was excited and I never had a chance to make a point about You know, what was the feel like or how much did they try to popularize this finding so that people of African descent would understand that. Archeology is not just about one group but there are many findings that would illustrate that that the African person a person of African descent did also surface in many of the medieval finds. Yes. Just that nobody has focused really on extensive research to make it become popular and people want to know and to advance certain to Greater studies. I didn't get a chance to voice that that opinion when that information was brought to our attention, but I mentioned

two areas that fascinated me because I forgot this one which was made my eyes almost popped open as it was presented, you know, because they showed feature of this find that that showed evidence that yes, this find is actually somebody who is of African descent because of physical features spoke loudly to that everything. Oh, yeah, it is so important.

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**Kirsten:** I think one of the important things that you really hit there is bringing the information like this to the public so that people who, living in some regions of the world may be made to feel like outsiders when they actually have a very deep history in that region or in that area and the UK is definitely no exception to that as to my knowledge, people of African descent have been in the UK since the Roman era.

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**Dorothy:** Yes, exactly. Yes.

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**Kirsten:** So yes, that's it's not necessarily represented that way in the modern media or in the public and having, I think people in the UK of African descent today have a right to feel like they belong and that they have deep roots there as well. They are not as much of an outsider as they may be led to believe, so I think that was a good point.

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**Chelsi:** It is, and we see examples of that around. There's been several things in the newspaper in the last two or three years with some early colonial barrels. Are they found someone of African descent buried in a lead coffin, right and led coffins were expensive particularly in the really early colonial period when you don't have a lot of towns or anything set up like this is stuff that's being shipped from Europe over here right? And they're heavy right so you would have had to buy it in Europe and then pay for people to move it and load it and then it taking up space on this ship that could have been used for, you know, grain or water, because some of these are very foundational level requirements for life. So this is really expensive. So it's really important that it be publicized that it's heard on podcasts in newspapers in historical representations in museums, in classrooms, so that people realize that you know the world is it a much more interconnected place and has been very interconnected for millennia.

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**Kirsten:** Awesome. I love that.

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**Chelsi:** On that note we are approaching the end of our recording sessions, unfortunately. I don't know if Dorothy or Kirsten, either of you have any kind of last-minute tidbits that you are really wanting to get in there, but now's your chance.

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**Dorothy:** Yes, I was very excited after attending the conference and I had hope that you know, at least one person would have somehow focused or made mention to a great extent about the post-medieval ceramics, but be that as it may it was where it was a very rich conference. I wish more of my own people knew of it so that they could also be part of the pool of present presenters giving their perspective as it relates to our own culture and see how you know, all symbiotic it is to that of the British culture historically. We cannot separate what archaeological evidence there are in British archaeology from what is in the Caribbean archaeology and more so Jamaica because we are who we are as a people because of the influence of Britain on our culture. So they are symbiotic now.

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**Kirsten:** That's really great. I think this is good I didn't have anything more special to say.

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**Chelsi:** Dorothy, it's really been so phenomenal having you on the show. We're so thrilled that you reached out to us and wanted to come on. We've loved learning a little bit about you and about archaeology in Jamaica, and we are really grateful for you making the time to come on the show. Thank you so much.

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**Dorothy:** I'm grateful, and I'm thankful for the opportunity.

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**Chelsi:** Of course. Thank you so much. On that note, until next time!