
Garbology in Action Report:

Utilising the given assemblages what social patterns can be inferred?

OVERVIEW

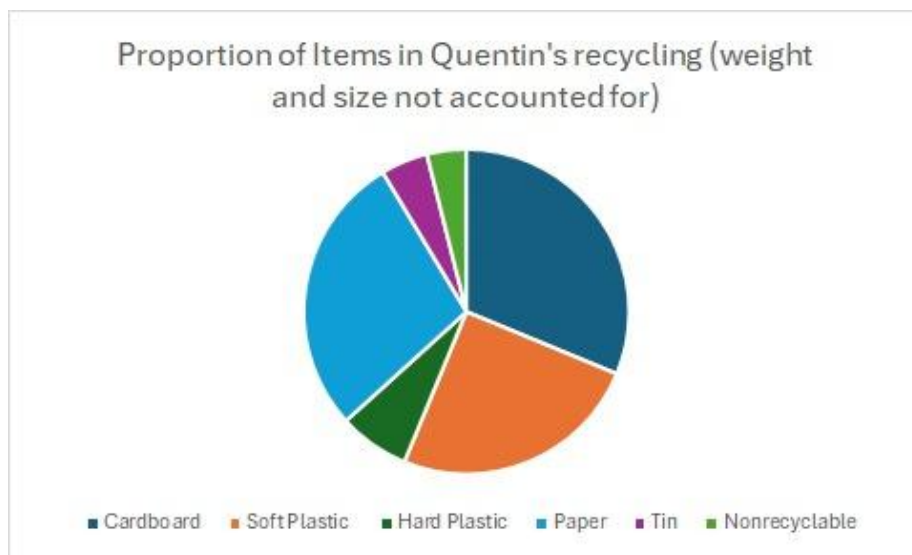
To begin with, Garbology is a form of actualistic study performed within the wider range of archaeological discourse. It was pioneered by William L. Rathje in his garbage project to study the refuse of sectors in the city of Tucson, Arizona in the USA. Dr Rathje and his findings were a great benefit to archaeology as a field of study as he showed that people had a social attachment to their refuse and often lied about what they were throwing away prior to his excavations. His findings stress a need to follow a processualist approach and utilise the benefits of scientific analysis in the field of archaeology. We have utilised his approach to studying characteristics and social patterns ourselves and applied them in this project and the assemblages we have been provided.

The Assemblage



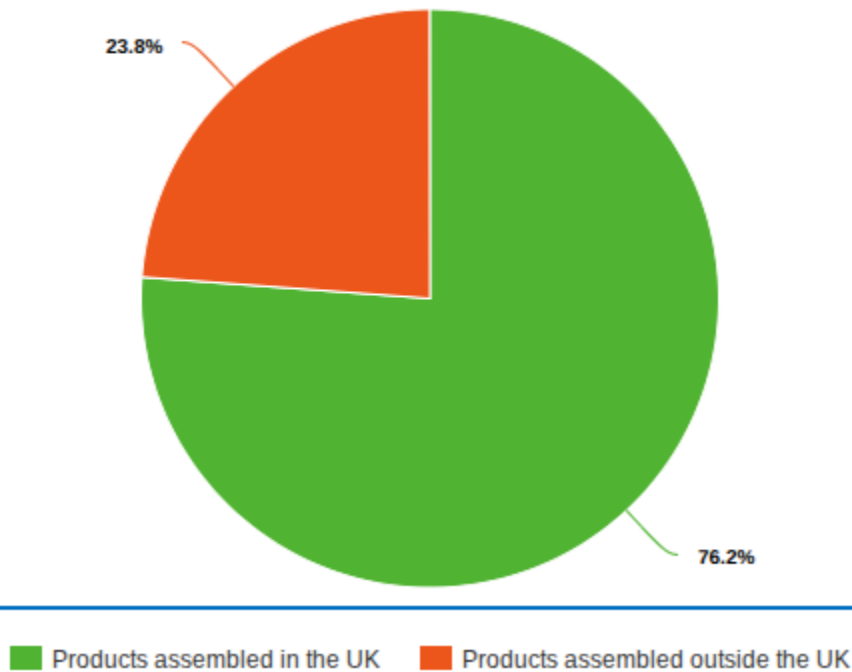
The Data

Lots of data was pulled from the assemblage gathered as we took apart the collection to first form into material cultures. We further broke this down into including the differentiation of hard plastics like the ones used in tupperware to softer plastics used in the packaging of products or the bags that were filled with the assemblage originally. We found that soft plastics, cardboard and paper were the mainstays within the assemblage. It also featured a small portion dedicated to non-recyclables as well which will be touched upon in the following section on social patterns and characteristics. Here is the Pie Chart created using the data gathered by the group segregating the materials into classifications:

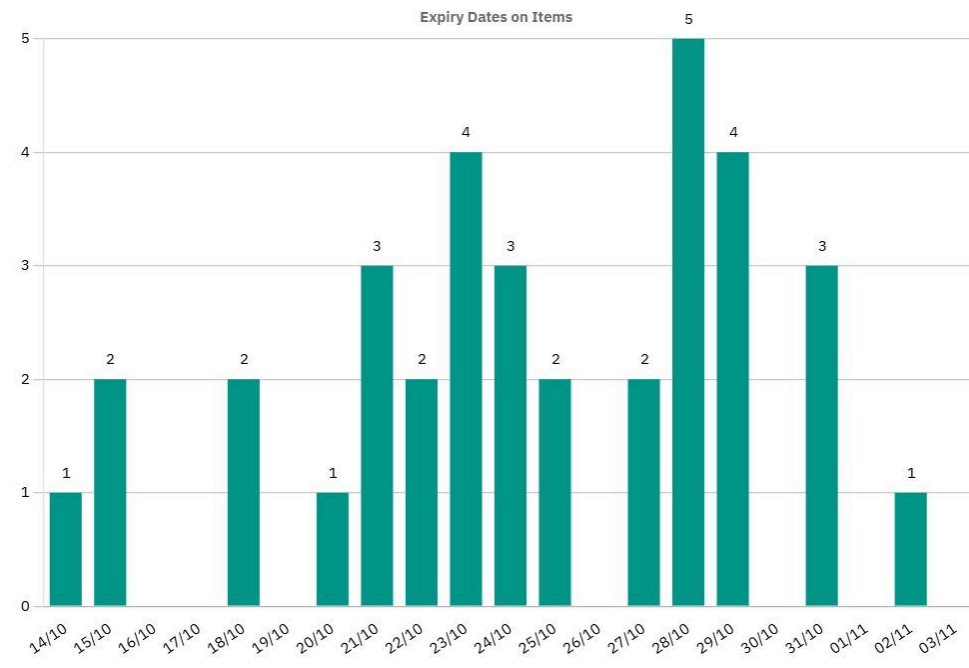


Furthermore, it could also be gathered that around 178 items were in the assemblage and accounted for. More data could also be pulled upon from a piece of the assemblage itself. With the discovery of a shopping receipt the spending of the people responsible for creating the assemblage of garbage could be figured out and applied to the refuse that was presented. The number that was discovered in a single shop of the people behind the assemblage was worked out to be in the range of £24.95 then £19.25 with savings applied after. Additionally post discovery of the receipt we worked out that the average for the whole assemblage which could be then worked out to be over a week or two. The total spending reached among the assemblage was £234.56.

A Pie chart to show the distribution of manufacturers within the assemblage provided



This Chart shows that in general the distribution of items within the assemblage are created here in the UK, or at the very least assembled here with things like the “crumb” in Cadbury Dairy Milk products being made in Ireland before being ported to the wider manufacturing centre in Birmingham. This data suggests quite clearly that products that the people behind the assemblage have purchased are generally assembled and manufactured within the UK and are relatively local products, with most of these products also generally being made in northern population centres like Manchester. However, this set of data can be quite deceiving as to uncovering and understanding the taphonomy of the assemblage overall. This is because despite a lot of these products being manufactured in the UK, the packaging and raw materials required to create that packaging, does not crucially. As an example the UK, despite being a leading location for plastics production with 1.7 million tonnes per year that raw plastics output does not keep up with the demand of around 3.3 million tonnes per year, therefore it can be said that with enough certainty that a portion of the plastics seen within the assemblage, combining hard and soft variants together, must have originated abroad in some capacity.



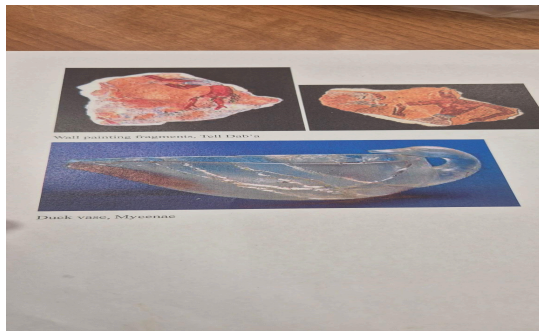
In general, the timeline established from expiry dates show us that the perishable products found in the assemblage must have been consumed within this timeframe: the 14th of October to at the latest the 2nd of November; a 19 day period surrounding two weeks of shopping most likely and maybe the back end of a third shopping spree.

Characteristics and Social patterns

Within the assemblage, many social patterns and characteristics could be inferred from individual items and even collections of items we included in our data sets. Such as the Coca-Cola diet bottles forming its own pattern of having all the caps and being crushed in a way that was almost identical among the whole set of bottles. This can be used to infer social characteristics about the person behind the disposal of the bottles as it tells us that they don't just leave the bottle cap off separate to the actual bottle itself, which in even just that little bit of information suggests a social pattern within this person of making an effort to recycle properly. Or at least some baseline care for the environment to pick up on smaller details such as that. The way the bottles are all disposed of in the same way with the signature crushing also represents the notion that these bottles were disposed of by the same person and perhaps the large volume being disposed all at once suggests a rather unhealthy attachment to the fizzy drink.

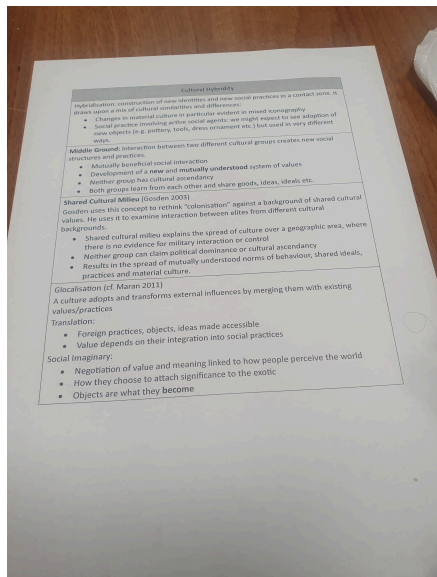
Additional social patterns could be inferred from the assemblage. Notably ones that led to forming an even more specific profile of the people responsible for the assemblage was the find surrounding the radiotimes magazine and also the printed copies of academic material and images. This was uniquely interesting to infer social characteristics about the demographic of the

people in the household this was due to the radiotimes firstly being a magazine purchased by an older reader base. The radiotimes is a magazine that shows all the current program listings on satellite TV across many channels. This is an interesting piece of the assemblage to us because we can use it to infer that the people responsible for the assemblage are of an older demographic rather than a young one. Ofcom statistics show that in the UK adults aged between 65 and 74 watch the most live broadcast TV of any other demographic grouping and have around a full 2 to 3 hours more time than 16 to 24 year olds in consuming this form of content. This demographic that we attribute the people behind the assemblage to can also be further reinforced by the most common demographic age group that purchases the actual radiotimes magazine itself in print. This average readership age for the print issue, which is a part of the assemblage in two separate instances, is 61 out of a reader base of around 1.1 million. It is crucial to our profiling of the people behind the refuse that it's the print issue as the online version of the same magazine has an average readership age of ten and younger, with 20 million unique users on the site. Therefore with relative confidence we can narrow this age of the people behind the assemblage of refuse down to an age bracket spanning 60 to 70 and can also suggest that they are people with difficulty utilising technology, with the purchase of a channel time magazine as this information is accessible on the internet with relative ease for younger people. We can possibly back this notion up further with another piece of the assemblage, the cutouts and printed images.



These cutouts are uniquely useful to gathering information on the social patterns of the people in the household because they signify to us that, instead of maybe saving photos to an electronic device as a younger person would, they would rather print physical media which is something someone who is older would be inclined to do as they maybe might have a limited understanding of technology which would reinforce the notion that the social profile of the people in the household is one of an older demographic grouping. There is also another key characteristic of the people or person behind these cutouts and printed images that can be inferred from them. They must be a person who is academically inclined and may possibly be a person with a job

surrounding this interest, which we can also infer from these parts of the assemblage to be Archaeology. This interest in Archaeology can not only be worked out from the photo of an ancient coin, from the late iron age (Of the celtic Catuvellauni tribe), but also from the images of the Duck Vase and Wall painting fragments. The majority of the images on the page like the Duck Vase is located in the NAMA or National Archaeological Museum of Athens which provides us with a clear commonality across almost all the printouts and that is archaeology. It is clear as day that the persons responsible for the assemblage have a clear interest in the subject of study. Additionally there is further evidence to suggest that they might both be archaeologists and that there are two people responsible for the assemblage.



This next finding is interesting to us as it may provide evidence on the nature of at least one of the two peoples jobs or at the very least that they work in an academic field linked to archaeology in some format. The image on the left is of a print out on cultural hybridity. The actual printout itself is useful in determining that this person is linked closely to academics in their job as this piece is original and crucially not a creation of someone else or printed from the internet. It is a piece of work that has been created and printed out by the person behind disposal of it. However this alone is useless to actually linking it to a face behind the assemblage and crucially, the job that supplies the people in the household with their relatively expensive shopping habits as

shown in the data. That data generally suggests two people who have a comfortable enough income to afford as many items as they do. However, we could work out the names of two separate people on packages and letters within the assemblage. Kathryn Fewster/ Drew and Quentin Drew. This was crucial to informing the characteristics of the pair as we could work out that Quentin was involved in archaeology as he is the course lead for it. But for Kathryn Drew/Fewster we worked out that she too is an ethnoarchaeologist from a research paper online that suggests she also works for the Lampeter location at the University of Wales, which is the same university Quentin Drew works for. Ethnoarchaeology is also a subject which would explain the handouts for cultural hybridity which could possibly be a topic within that field. Also interesting among all of this is the use of Fewster as a possible maiden name on the university email and the research paper suggests that she was involved in University work before meeting Quentin Drew (possibly not the same university as on the paper as well). This suggests she may have been in a job for long enough to earn enough income on a regular basis to support the spending shown by the data.

To Conclude

It can be concluded that Garbology as a form of archaeological research is most useful for identifying social characteristics and patterns simply from the trash we throw away. This has been most evident from the way we were able to conclude from the assemblage that Two people of similar economic standing who are both academics in the field of archaeology in some format and are also between the age bracket of 60 to 70. The data we gathered from the assembly by putting it into material classifications and expiry dates also allowed us to infer much about their shopping patterns and when they shopped simply based on the dates of the food they used and threw away. The items they consume also tell us much about them as people as the mountains of smoking paraphernalia could explain certain cleaning habits like a car being cleaned and packets that have gathered over time have been removed in a certain way as an example. Or the example that was included in the report, the coke bottles being crushed in a certain way and disposed of together also tells us a story of unhealthy habits as well as being able to link the disposal of them down to a the repeated almost identical way they were crushed and it is all down to the garbology project we have put into action that all these social patterns could be inferred..

Credit to Nick Drake and Will Harvey, part of the group doing the project who made the data graphs on pages 2 and 4 respectively.

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