

ANNUAL REPORT: OAKINGTON 2014 FIELD SCHOOL

Director(s): Dr. Duncan Sayer, Senior Lecturer, University of Central Lancashire (UK)
Co-Director(s): Dr. Faye Sayer, Senior Lecturer, Manchester Metropolitan University (UK)
Richard Mortimer, Senior Project Manager, Oxford Archaeology East (UK)



[The ongoing exaction of grave 116 posted on Twitter on July 8th 2014](#)

The Oakington Field School is located north of Cambridge in the UK, took place between the 14th of June and the 13th July 2014. This four week program (five days each week) included five students from the IFR, two from Manchester Metropolitan University, 17 undergraduate students and five masters students from the University of Central Lancashire. There were eight members of full time project staff and one part time member as well as part time experimental archaeologists. For one week each we were joined by three High School students on the 'muddy start program', which provides an introduction to university archaeology. Hundreds of school children from around the region visited to see the archaeology and to get involved, particularly with the local primary school and scouts groups.

The daily routine started at 8.30am until 6pm, with tea at 10.30am, lunch at 1pm and afternoon tea at 3.30pm. The project ran Tuesday to Sunday each week to encourage local visitors at the weekend. During this time students were involved in the identification, excavation and recording of features using the MoLAS single context recording system, they drew plans and sections, identified and excavated archaeological features, washed and sorted finds, took and sorted environmental samples and supervised school visits or communicated with the public. There were a whole series of organized lectures, starting in the first week with a focus on practical skills, health and safety, recording methods and the history of the excavation. During the second week the talks focused on Middle Saxon Archaeology, Ancient DNA and Church Archaeology. In the third week practical skills were put to the test with surveying sessions, the children's day (an outreach event focused on a series of local schools) and the field trip to West Stow and Sutton Hoo and well as a local large scale open area commercial excavation (Bell's Language School, Cambridgeshire). In week four the classes focused on human remains the finds

from the site and the ethics of excavations. The end of dig lecture was presented by Dr Duncan Sayer and Richard Mortimer and presented to the whole site team and over 100 locals.

In the evenings dinner was delivered at 7pm but on Thursdays the whole team went to the local pub to eat and to compete against the villagers in the pub quiz. This nicely integrated the large excavation team in a small and quiet village community and gave students and locals the opportunity to talk outside of the formal project setting. The Village day this year was an enormous success with thousands of visitors, and archaeology students leading tours around the site. The volunteers wore yellow tee-shirts and their activities focused on an exhibition, or the children's activity area or the site itself. The exhausting day was ended in an entertainment tent with live music and dancing. During the week the teams were divided up into three sports groups for evening activities – the Saxons, Viking and Normans who competed at Rounders, face painting and touch rugby. Other daily activities included Archaeologist of the day and the golden trowel for best digging or best find – an image of the archaeologist holding the golden trowel was posted on twitter.

On the day off Cambridge city was a popular attraction and the American WW2 Cemetery proved to be a popular visit amongst IFR students.

The 2014 field season included three trenches adjacent to the areas investigated in 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013. The first large trench was four meters by forty meters and was situated to identify the eastern edge of the village to try and find Middle and Later Saxon settlement activity. We exacted a whole series of complex intercutting ditches, the post holes of buildings and rubbish pits as well as the large ditches at the back end of Medieval Oakington; these were really interesting and included corn dryers, industrial rubbish pits and an environmental sample with spoiled grain burned for fuel. In the second trench were excavating adjacent to the main focus of the 2010-2013 trenches – with this large 25m trench took the total intervention in this area up to 75mx75m. Its main focus was to eliminate the possibility of graves and to investigate both inside and outside of a mysteries eight century enclosure complex. The enclosure continued to provide large quantities of Ipswich Ware, as well as beam slots and evidence of buildings. We also found our first solid evidence of Iron Age archaeology with a round house and corded ware pottery. As with trench one this large investigation focused on boundaries and the medieval component of the project focused on the transition from back yards to fields, where wells and other rubbish pits were excavated.

The third trench was located in the only remaining part of the site where the early Anglo-Saxon cemetery was expected. This was a small area, some four by ten meters and was adjacent to the modern road (a quiet access road of the tennis court and parish recreation building). One complete grave was excavated, an adult woman dating to the sixth century with beads, a comb and three brooches, oddly the modern services had been bored through her middle, cutting a half dozen vertebra but neatly avoiding the grave goods. The remains of two infants and a second adult were also recovered (this adult consisted of two fragments of arm and a wrist clasp).

Other activities included on-site experimental archaeology – an early medieval boat, which was successfully sailed on the river Cam, and an Anglo-Saxon house built by archaeologists and children of lime mortar in the primary school.

This season was filmed throughout the project, and will be broadcast in the UK on BBC4 in November on a TV show called *Digging for Britain*. This involved site footage, some excavation

work and a speeded up sequence of burial 116 being excavated. It also involved images and studio footage focused on previous seasons.

The Oakington Website is now up and running www.boneswithoutbarriers.org and during excavation this hosted a weekly blog, photos and links to our Twitter feed [@oakingtondig](https://twitter.com/oakingtondig) and Facebook pages providing a central hub for the digital media.