

Public engagement in our everyday work

Farriers Way, Warboys, Cambridgeshire



Warboys Archaeology Group volunteers taking part in the evaluation in May 2018 ©Oxford Archaeology

In 2018–19 Oxford Archaeology’s East office, based near Cambridge, undertook the archaeological evaluation and excavation of a 3.5-hectare site on the outskirts of Warboys, Cambridgeshire. The work was commissioned by The Environmental Dimension Partnership (EDP), on behalf of Bellway Homes Limited (Northern Home Counties) ahead of residential

development of the site. The excavation was undertaken in accordance with a brief issued by Cambridgeshire County Council which required a strategy for site presentation, to include the issue of press releases/articles, an open day for visitors (where appropriate) and/or a parish-based presentation of the excavated remains.



A final team photograph with OA East archaeologists and volunteers in winter 2019 © Oxford Archaeology



Above and below: The site presentation event at Warboys Methodist Church in July 2019 © Oxford Archaeology



COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

OA East already had strong links with the local community. It helped to establish the Warboys Archaeology Group, a sub-group of the Warboys Local History Society, as part of the National Lottery Heritage Funded Jigsaw community archaeology project in 2011.

During the three weeks of evaluation trenching in May 2019, nine members of the Warboys Archaeology Group took part alongside OA East's professional team. Permission was granted by EDP and Bellway Homes, and OA East followed ClfA's guidance on the use of volunteers and students on archaeological projects.

In August 2019, OA East returned to excavate the site and 15 individuals volunteered over 200 days over a period of four months. EDP and Bellways gave support and PPE (hard hats and hi-vis vests) for the volunteers taking part. One of the volunteers was a locally based university student, looking for experience during a 'sandwich' placement year during their degree course at Bournemouth University, and is now employed by OA East following graduation. Some of the other volunteers were members of the Warboys Archaeology Group who had also taken part in the evaluation. The group also undertook a geophysical survey of a neighbouring sports field out of their own interest, borrowing geophysical survey equipment held by OA East as part of the Jigsaw community archaeology project.

All those who completed a feedback form rated the experience as 'Excellent' or 'Good' and said they would recommend it to others. Here is a selection of comments:

'This was a great opportunity to work in Warboys and being involved led to a geophysical survey of the sports field which would just not have happened, but which has the potential to add to the village's knowledge about its heritage.'

'Thank you and I very much appreciate the opportunity to carry on diggin'! Whilst this time of the year may not be the easiest weatherwise, I have thoroughly enjoyed the experience and look forward in continuing my learning with OAE in the near future. Steve and his team have been very welcoming and helped whenever I've required any guidance – so a big thanks to them!'

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The excavation finished in February 2019 and site conditions were very poor. Warboys Archaeology Group was consulted by OA East about whether a site-based open day should be held during the winter months. Together with the clients, all agreed to postpone a public site presentation event to the summer. A free drop-in exhibition was held at Warboys Methodist Church for local residents to meet the archaeologists involved and see a selection of the finds in July 2019, coinciding with the Festival of Archaeology. Warboys Archaeology Group was consulted about where and when to host the event and was on hand to help during the day, and members of the church congregation put on refreshments. A school student, as part of their work experience placement with OA East, was involved in helping to put together information and photos for the display boards, selecting finds for display and helping to prepare the object labels.

Over 140 residents dropped by to meet the team and see the finds. All of the visitors who completed feedback forms rated the event as ‘Excellent’ for interest, information and enjoyment and here are a selection of comments:

‘Fantastic. Friendly staff, wonderful.’

‘Needed a bit longer. Experts on hand were most informative. Amazed at range of items and also have been told of quantity found. All exciting.’

‘Excellent presentation. Would like more.’

OA East returned to the village in the autumn to give a talk to the Warboys Local History Society, open to the whole community, and also gave a talk and display at the Cambridge Antiquarian Society’s annual conference on local archaeological discoveries in November 2019, attended by over 100 people.

PUBLICITY AND PRESS RELATIONS

An initial press release about the ongoing archaeological investigations came out in November 2018, and another was released about the site’s findings in July 2019, coinciding with the public presentation event. The story was covered online by local news outlets including BBC Cambridgeshire, the *Cambridge News*, *The Hunts Post* and *Peterborough Today*, and by the national newspaper *The Times*. OA East’s archaeologists gave an interview with BBC Radio Cambridgeshire.

An article was subsequently published in the popular archaeology magazine *British Archaeology* in March/April 2020.

Clemency Cooper, Oxford Archaeology



An article about the site published in *British Archaeology* magazine (March/April 2020) ©British Archaeology ©Oxford Archaeology



An initial press release about the excavations (November 2018, screenshot) ©The Hunts Post