

Fig. 1: site and trench location

Michael Faraday School, a LAARC Community Excavation Project

Pat Miller and Kate Sumnall

Introduction

In June and July of 2007 the LAARC (London Archaeological Archive and Research Centre) in association with MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology) undertook a community excavation at the Michael Faraday Primary School which is located at Hopwood Road, Walworth, Southwark. It is located within the Aylesbury Estate; the centre of the site lies at National Grid Reference 532884 177953 (Fig. 1).

This project follows similar community excavation projects the LAARC team have organised in Shoreditch Park, Hackney, and the Bruce Castle Park, Tottenham. Our work at these two sites has created a model for running a community excavation that can be easily adapted to work for any site. It is flexible enough to accommodate and encourage different partnerships and themes. With each project we update the methodology, trying to utilise and maximise the use of new available technology. For example

with the Michael Faraday excavation we tried to widen access with greater dissemination of information via blogs, videos and on-line photos.

The previous two excavations were based in parks; one of the prime sources of open land suitable for these projects. In the middle of a heavily built-up city where else provides the opportunity to dig a publicly accessible trench? School playgrounds appeared to be the natural answer. Schools are an ideal location in many respects. They form a central focus for the community, often centrally located within a community, and families regularly gather to drop-off and collect children. The children themselves can act as a conduit conveying their interest and enthusiasm to their family and friends. In the case of Michael Faraday Primary School the playground is enclosed within a wall, offering security to the site out of hours, and could provide resources such as storage for equipment and access to water and computers.

The Community Archaeology Project was a joint venture between the Museum of London and the Michael Faraday Primary School, Southwark Council, funded and supported by LAARC, Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Excavation Committee (SLAEC), the Standing Conference on London Archaeology (SCOLA) and the University of East London; equipment was donated by Spear and Jackson.

Prior to fieldwork MOLA prepared a desk-based assessment that included research into the history and archaeology of the Aylesbury Estate, including the area of the Michael Faraday Primary School.¹ A ground-penetrating radar survey² and an evaluation³ had taken place in May 2007 in order to locate the best position for an excavation trench. The subsequent excavation was the site chosen for the LAARC Community Archaeology Project⁴ and was located in the area within the grass of the playground to the rear of the school

building. The project's site code is MFP07.

Project background

The Michael Faraday Primary School offers the necessary security and access to resources, and it is also an excellent school consistently scoring 'outstanding' with Ofsted. Most importantly the staff are willing to embrace new projects and external partnerships; and to use such opportunities inventively across the curriculum. As mentioned earlier, schools represent an excellent entry point into a community. This school is absolutely representative of the local population, with twenty different languages spoken. The school is also overlooked by blocks of flats creating an amphitheatre effect. Our project in the centre would be clearly visible and hopefully arouse curiosity.

The Aylesbury Estate first became known in the 1960s as an experiment in social engineering, where it was believed environment could have a positive effect on social problems. The estate then became the focus of attention in 1997, when Tony Blair visited and used the estate as a symbol of New Labour's determination to tackle social exclusion.⁵ Currently the Estate is in the process of a fifteen-year regeneration programme. The Council

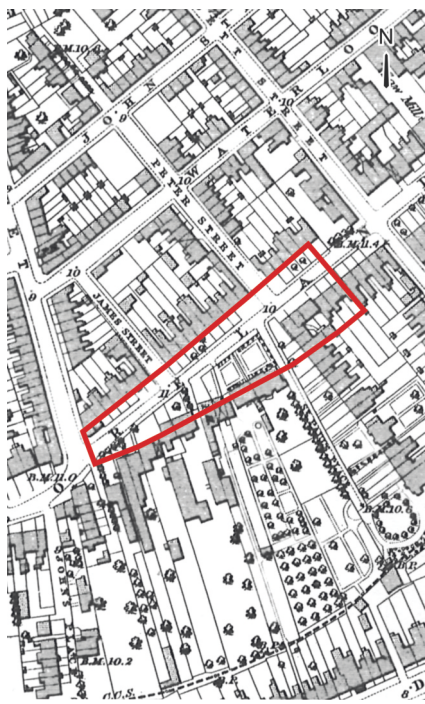


Fig 2: detail of the 1871 Ordnance Survey map showing the limits of the original Victorian School grounds

embraced our project as one small element that could contribute towards this regeneration.

The Aylesbury Estate is one of the largest council estates in Europe. It has extreme socio-economic problems with high levels of unemployment, poverty and crime. Ofsted described it as an "area of considerable deprivation". Gang culture is rife and many families are dysfunctional; there is a lack of positive role models and for some young people gang life is an easy option to fall into.

So in summary we had a fantastic school with open space in the middle of a challenging area, an ideal opportunity to try to introduce the Museum and archaeology to a new audience. However, we also needed some accessible archaeology. Fortunately the initial research revealed there were likely to be 18th- and 19th-century remains within the first metre of the trench. This is ideal for community excavations, because the excavated remains are supported by maps, pictures, photos and oral history, which aid interpretation and make the process of archaeology more understandable. Archaeology of this date in this context was also unlikely to be complicated or of national or regional significance, again good for children who have tendencies to dig like rabbits and where we only have two hours with them. Finally the remains were also fairly shallow, which meant our trench was safe for access for children and anyone with mobility problems.

Aims of the LAARC Community Excavation Project

- To engage with local communities.
- To explore local history and archaeology.
- To increase awareness about the Museum of London
- To provide opportunities to learn new skills.
- To encourage more diversity amongst those involved in archaeology.
- To promote a greater sense of ownership of the shared past and pride of place.

Organisation of the excavation – details of the sessions

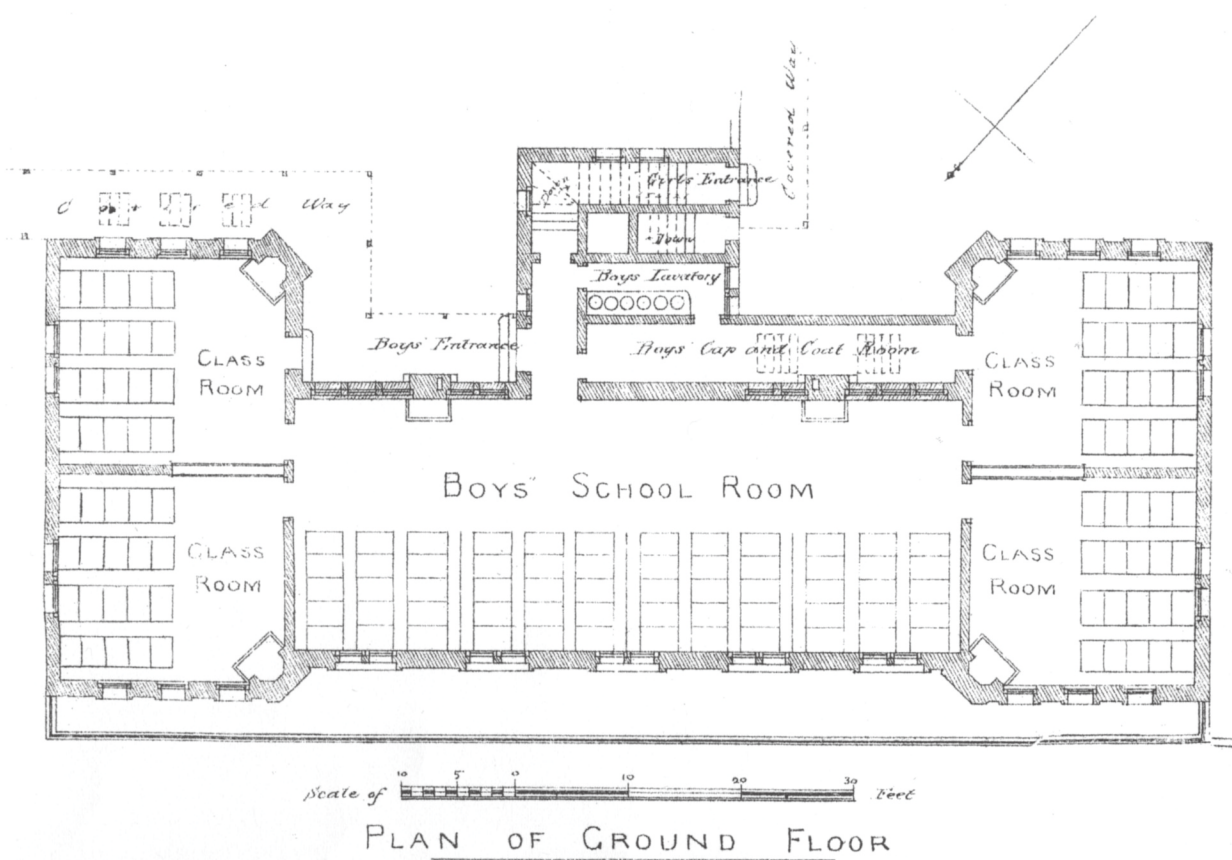
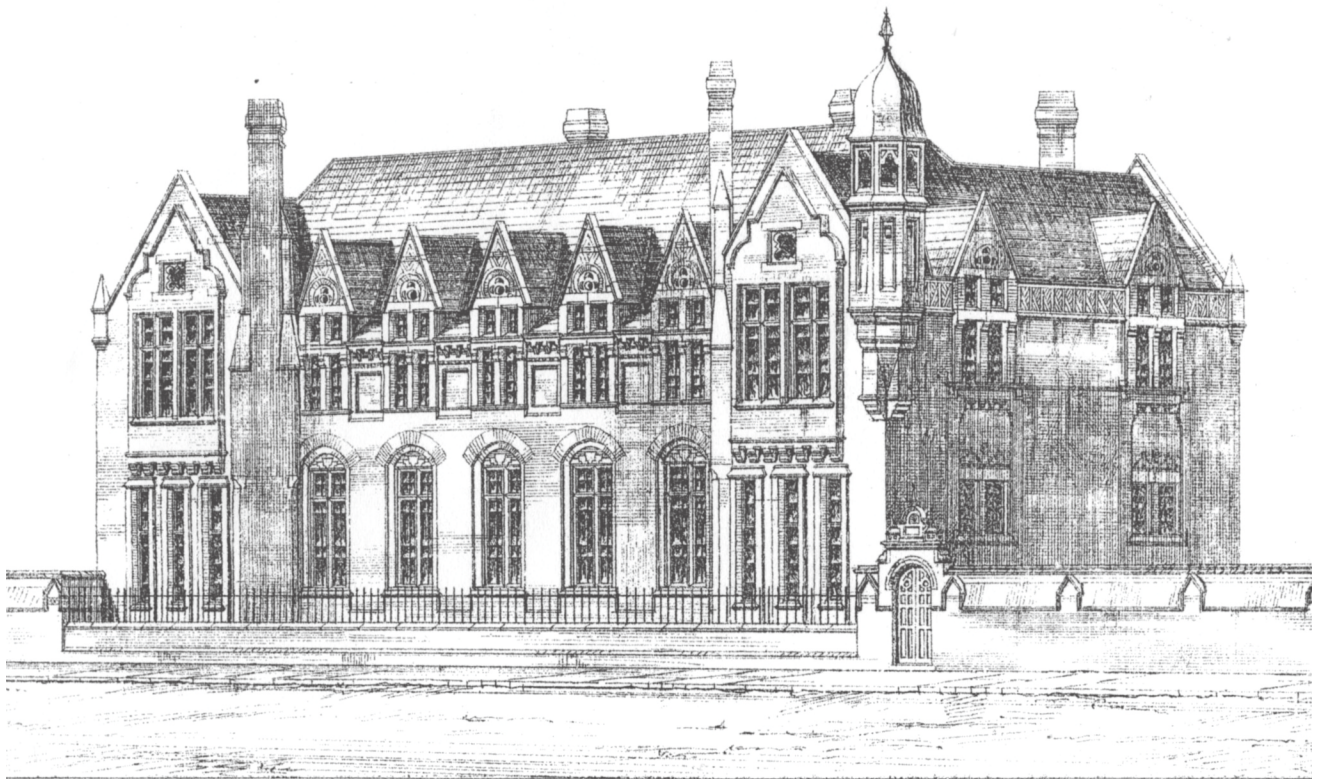
The community excavation was open for two weeks. During the week the

sessions were available for schools with after-school sessions for other groups. At the weekend the dig was opened up for participation by local interested groups or individuals.

The average session lasted two hours with an introduction explaining archaeology; the local history as understood from map regression and other sources; what the session would involve, i.e. excavation and finds processing and the importance of these processes; we also covered the necessary health and safety requirements. Each group was then divided into halves, where one half learnt to excavate and used their new skills to progress the work in the trench. The other half learnt to process finds, then washed and identified finds from the site. The two groups then switched activities. At the end of the session the two halves were reunited and there was a discussion about the results of their work and how it contributed to the overall interpretation of the site. There was also an opportunity for questions, with many questions arising about archaeology as a career.

Site background

During the medieval and early post-medieval periods the area was fields or woodland. Historical mapping dating from the 17th and 18th centuries, such as the Plan of Walworth Manor of 1681⁷ and the Rocque map of 1746,⁸ show the school site as open ground or fields. During the 18th century housing began to appear in the area. Cary's map of 1787⁹ shows two groups of houses at either end of Walworth Common, namely Portland Place and Westmoreland Row. The Horwood map of 1799 to 1819¹⁰ shows that the site was occupied by two groups of terraced housing aligned along the old course of the Westmoreland Road. This map shows housing on the south side of what was then the route known as Walworth Common. Greenwood's map of 1827¹¹ indicates what appear to be various properties on the south side of Walworth Common. The more detailed Plan of the Walworth Common Estate dated to 1842¹² identifies the school area as occupied by properties addressed as 'St Paul's Place' at the west with larger individual properties, and 'Villa Place' to the east occupied



BOARD SCHOOLS - WESTMORELAND ROAD - WALWORTH.

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Fig. 3: elevation and plan of Boys School building 1873, from Sprague and Co London (The Architect)

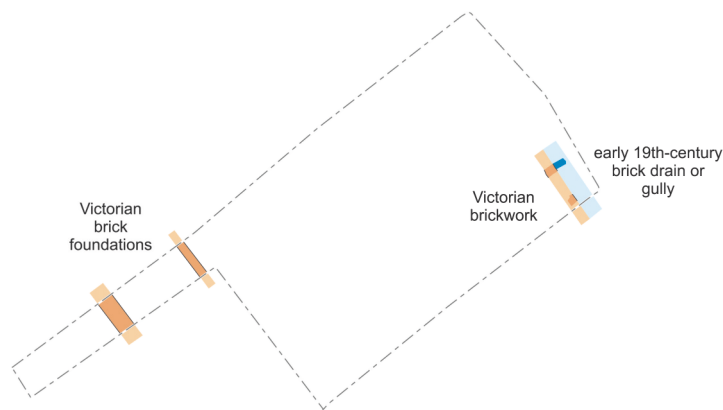


Fig. 4: plan of the early 19th century and later Victorian brick features in the trench

by more modest terraced housing. The 1871 Ordnance Survey map¹³ shows a similar layout with larger villas with front gardens to the west of St Paul's Place and terraces to the east (Fig. 2).

In 1871–3 two Common schools (one for boys and one for girls and infants) were built on the site. An illustration from 1873¹⁴ (Fig. 3) shows the elevation and plan of the Boys School with the address as Westmoreland Road. This building stood on the eastern half of the school grounds. The construction of the school led to the realignment of Westmoreland Road to the south so that the school buildings were constructed over the earlier housing. Part of the Victorian school is still standing, including the school wall, but the majority of the school was demolished for the Michael Faraday Primary School designed by the Greater London Council (GLC) Architect's Department, built on the site in the 1960s within the Aylesbury Estate.

Archaeological results

Prior to the community excavation three evaluation trenches were opened within the grassed area along the south side of the playground. Two phases of archaeological remains were identified; these were foundations associated with the early 19th-century housing and the remains of the Victorian school buildings. This confirmed that the school was built in 1873 over the demolished 19th-century housing and that the siting of the school had led to the realignment of Westmoreland Road. A larger excavation trench was opened at the north-east of the site (see Fig. 1) and the features previously observed during the evaluation and further

features exposed (Fig. 4).

At the south-east of the trench were the remains of a brick footing and a brick drain or gully aligned in a north-west/south-east direction. The red, frogged bricks from the drain have been identified as of a late 18th century/early 19th-century date and are probably associated with the early 19th-century housing on the site. These features are most probably remains associated with either the 'Villa Place' terraced housing or out-buildings associated with them that lay to the east of St Pauls Place. Adjacent to the drain to the west was a later course of brick work incorporating Victorian stock brick, either a later addition to the drain or later brick feature. To the north of these features was an area of modern concrete.

At the north-west of the trench was a substantial brick foundation aligned in a north-west/south-east direction comprising yellow stock bricks. Approximately 2.6m to the east of this was a lesser stock brick foundation. These are thought to represent part of the former Victorian school building that had been truncated during demolition and the construction of the current school. The foundations probably form part of a later southern extension to the entrance to the Boys School building as shown on the 1894 Ordnance Survey map¹⁵ and the 1914 Ordnance Survey map¹⁶ (Fig. 5). A concrete slab was also identified in the north-west corner of site butting up against the masonry. It was initially thought that this slab was part of the former school playground, but it is now believed that it could be part of the floor for a room within the Victorian School. Oral history collected during the excavation suggests this may be in

the area of the head teacher's office or a cloak room.

Above the masonry, dumps of post-medieval demolition were observed containing frequent fragments of post-medieval masonry likely to have come from the previous Victorian School on the site. These contained fragments of building material, oyster shell, pottery, worked bone, the occasional animal bone and pieces of clay pipe as well as more recent material. Pottery from the site was primarily post-medieval, however a few residual sherds of medieval pottery were also recovered. They included a fine Surrey White Ware rim of a bowl or drinking vessel, and suggest scattered medieval activity in the area.

During the excavation a redeposited Mesolithic/early Neolithic piece of worked flint was recovered from a later deposit by one of the school students participating in the programme (Fig. 6). This small, snapped blade dates to c. 8000 to 3000 BC and was probably struck from the core with a soft wood or antler hammer. During the prehistoric periods the area in which the school is located lay in a marshy habitat of the floodplain associated with the Thames. Redeposited finds such as the blade from the excavation and material from nearby sites including flint scatters dated to the Mesolithic and Neolithic



Fig. 5: detail of the 1914 Ordnance Survey map showing Victorian school buildings and grounds

periods and an occupation site in Southwark¹⁷ suggests this area offered plentiful resources during the prehistoric period.

In conclusion, although the remains from the excavation were sparse, it has reaffirmed the position of the Victorian School in relation to the modern Michael Faraday Primary School and located early 19th-century features associated with houses that predated the Victorian School. Most importantly the excavation was successful in engaging with children of all ages within Michael Faraday School itself as well as other primary and secondary schools from the area (Fig. 7).

Project results

Over the two weeks we worked with c. 500 children and adults; including all the pupils from Y1 to Y6 of Michael Faraday Primary School and other local schools and groups. To engage with those who did not actively participate, we also placed regular photos and

updates on the fence panels around the trench and on the school fence. In addition we posted similar updates and blogs online using the Museum's and School's websites, Flickr and YouTube. In total we received 1395 hits on our website, Flickr and YouTube pages. We also encouraged anyone who participated or was interested to add their accounts and comments. People came forward and offered their memories about a buried time capsule and also their experiences of the previous school on the site from the perspective of school council member, staff and pupil which all helped with the interpretation of our discoveries.

Over the course of the project we received help from three volunteers, four work experience placements and one post-graduate Student Placement. They helped with research and the organisation before the start of the dig and then helped with the sessions. One of the volunteers, who has also helped with previous projects, decided over the

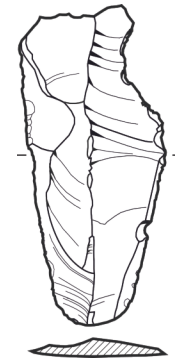


Fig. 6: Mesolithic/Early Neolithic blade from the site (scale 1:1)

summer to study for an archaeological degree and has since gained a place at Oxford University. We also visited local societies after the dig to report on the project, and we received more feedback and accounts of the area.

The School embraced this project not only in facilitating the dig and enabling students to engage with the sessions but also using the project to fit



Fig. 7: students on site with archaeologists and LAARC staff at Michael Faraday Primary School (Photo: A. Corsini)

into lessons across the curriculum. Pupils were very enthusiastic; asking about progress during breaks and before and after school and attending the weekend sessions. Two pupils also helped with the final recording of the trench after the school day. Pupils would also bring in objects they had found for identification.

The results of the evaluation forms are summarised below:

Comments on the evaluation forms about which bit they enjoyed the most and why:

	yes	no	don't know
I enjoyed taking part in the dig	99%	1%	0%
I learned some interesting new things about archaeology	95%	2%	3%
I could understand most of the things we saw and did	87%	1%	12%
I know more about the local area in the past	76%	12%	12%
I would like to find out more	78%	9%	13%

“The washing one because we just have to wash it with the brush and I saw what I have never seen before and some beautiful things.”

“Digging because I’ve never dug before so it was a great first time experience.”

“Finds cleaning because before you clean them they’re dirty pieces of nothing but when you do clean them you uncover their true beauty.”

“I enjoyed the digging the most because you found items that might not be around any more. You also get to hold them and next time they might be in a museum.”

“I like the digging most because I found a lot of things and its just fun.”

“Cleaning the artefacts because I learnt some amazing stuff while I was cleaning.”

“The digging because I learnt a lot more about the past.”

The next stage

All the enthusiasm and interest the project created was fantastic but we wanted to keep the relationship going with the community after we left. We invited them to museum events, for example National Archaeology Week and provided information about the Council for British Archaeology and the Young Archaeologists Club – ways they can develop their interest themselves. To continue the relationship we want to re-engage with the area to develop initial interest and also to connect with new people. We hope to investigate Burgess Park in the future. We would also like to build on our work with the local societies and do more formal oral history. Many of our aims are long term and any results will be delayed, for example, contributing towards a changing demographic of archaeologists and museum professionals. All we can do is ignite interest, provide positive role models for a career many might not have considered and endeavour to create a lasting relationship. After a session one secondary teacher reported that 50% of her class were considering a career in archaeology. Set against a background

where there are high numbers of young school leavers and the prevalent gang culture, for these pupils to consider a career is exceptional. If even one or two go into archaeology that will contribute towards the future face of archaeology, one that is more reflective of London’s population; but it will equally be a success if those children become the next town planners or politicians and keep their interest and awareness of archaeology.

Acknowledgements

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Pat Miller is a senior archaeologist with Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA) and Kate Sumnall is the Finds Liaison Officer and Community Archaeologist for the Museum of London..

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