

Holy Family School outreach: celebrating a developer-funded legacy site in Waltham Forest

When a developer failed to address a range of planning obligations, the Local Planning Authority consulted GLAAS for advice on the site's archaeological condition that had not been fulfilled. The result was a pop-up exhibition in Walthamstow as part of the stipulated outreach. Here Adam Single from GLAAS and Magnus Copps from MOLA explain the circumstances and the results.



Few archaeologists would glance at Walthamstow Village and not conclude the likelihood of a great time depth to past settlement there. Its 12th-century church, its Ancient House and its Old English *-stow* placename, alongside its location on a high, gravelly prominence between the rivers Lea and Ching, all point to a place long settled.

However, the extent of that time depth was only understood recently, following Pre-Construct Archaeology's excavation of the site of a new sports hall for Holy Family Catholic Technology College in Shernhall Street in 2017. More remains, possibly including a stone-built Roman building, are likely to survive beneath other parts of the school and future development in the area is likely to further improve our understanding of the earliest roots of the "stow".

Public engagement

On stripping the site in 2017, PCA immediately recognised a potential interest in the discovery of an early settlement and embarked on a programme of dissemination and engagement that began with a public site open day. A detailed publication

will be forthcoming in *LAMAS Transactions*.

Although local people were able to visit the site open day to see finds and witness the archaeological process first-hand, there was no provision in the planning consent for the popular dissemination of the final results and their wider significance. The 2016 planning condition, advised by GLAAS, contained no public engagement requirements at all. With the developer being the school itself, the opportunity to resource wider sharing of the results with local people was deemed to have passed, once PCA's conscientious and enthusiastic engagement work on site had been completed. However, in 2020 it transpired that the developer of a nearby site had failed to address a range of planning obligations, one of which had been to follow up on an earlier archaeological evaluation. The Local Planning Authority consulted GLAAS for advice on the site's outstanding archaeological condition, one of the breaches of planning control.

New outreach, thanks to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

With the new buildings at the breach site having been

ABOVE The display panels prepared for the Walthamstow pop-up exhibition held in September 2021 (© MOLA)

BELOW RIGHT The PCA excavations in 2017 found an unexpected late Bronze Age/early Iron Age settlement site, including a roundhouse (© PCA)

BELOW The excavations also found evidence of a 3rd-century Roman complex of timber buildings previously hinted at by an evaluation in 2009 (© PCA)



FAR RIGHT The finds table attracted visitors and spawned many questions about the history of Waltham Forest © MOLA

already completed, it was not possible to carry out extensive investigation, or to assess what might have been lost. Based on the trench evaluation results, GLAAS advised that the development could have harmed significant archaeological remains associated with the nearby school site, but that this could not be established for sure. Interpreting parts of NPPF 205 and 206, an alternative opportunity was instead identified to potentially secure an offsetting of the irreversible development harm, through improving public understanding of the area's archaeological past, in this case with a new outreach programme.

The GLAAS assessment was one of a potential loss of prehistoric and Roman archaeological evidence associated with the nearby school site. With the aberrant site being within the geographic setting of the known remains, it was possible to argue that revisiting the Holy Family school site and 'better revealing its significance' as part of the later development's planning remedies was an opportunity that could be supported in policy.

Outreach round 2

GLAAS suggested to the local planning authority that a policy-compliant approach to regularising an archaeological planning breach close to Holy Family School could comprise a programme of work to advance public understanding of the significance of the archaeology found there. This proposal was accepted by the developer's agents without resistance and a formal enforcement notice from the council set out the requirement for a written scheme of archaeological outreach and engagement, in order to regularise the development's planning situation.

Importantly, the written scheme requirement allowed GLAAS to ensure that the various strands of desired outreach were formally detailed, as well as the process of publicising the outreach beforehand, and evaluating its effectiveness afterwards. Much archaeological outreach is discovery-led, fitting into existing development programmes and project funding windows. This

BELOW One of the panels of the pop-up display explained about archaeological processes, while such themes as landscape change and the development of Walthamstow over time, were intended to appeal to local people © MOLA

EXPLORING WALTHAMSTOW'S PAST THROUGH ARCHAEOLOGY

In 2017 Pre-Construct Archaeology (PCA) started work on an excavation at Holy Family Catholic Technology College. Before digging archaeologists were able to learn about what they might expect to find by looking at documents like maps, digging trial trenches and doing a geophysical survey.

WHAT IS AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION?
Excavation involves digging carefully downwards, moving back to base through the layers of natural and human-made material that form a stratified sequence. By recording features, features made objects that are not movable such as a building, and artefacts (human made or modified objects that can be moved with or without) as they progress stages of each layer are created. By using scientific methods to research the design of features and artefacts, archaeologists can better understand the age of each layer.

WHAT IS A GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY?
Geophysical surveys use scientific equipment to detect archaeological features like ground, helping archaeologists choose where they should focus their attention.

WHAT ARE TRIAL TRENCHES?
These are small strategically placed trenches dug to give a sample of what a site contains. Four trial trenches were dug on the site by PCA in 2020, which suggested Roman and Bronze Age occupations.

PCA MOLA



case offered an opportunity to plan and deliver a more structured piece of work that could draw on what was learnt from the assessment and analyses of the fieldwork results.

Outreach included a webinar on pre-Medieval Shernhall Street and its surrounds, delivered by PCA and made available on Youtube as a legacy output, and the local pop-up exhibition was delivered by MOLA on behalf of PCA. These were promoted to a range of audiences through locally targeted social media posts and a press release.

The pop-up was hosted at a local community centre, The Mill. As well as excavation results, our written interpretation materials also explored some of the technical processes, such as excavation and geophysical survey, employed in investigating the site. Additional meaningful opportunities to engage with archaeology came in the form of a selection of finds from site on display, handling collections of comparable material, and the delivery of the event by site-experienced archaeologists who could engage public interest in how archaeology develops an understanding of the past.

Overall, the event attracted around 100 visitors across the course of a busy Saturday in September 2021. Visitors to the pop-up included a number of former pupils from the school itself. The venue, adjacent to Walthamstow Market and embedded in community networks, definitely contributed to achieving this number, as did local press coverage of the event generated by the press release.

Feedback indicated that this audience was heavily skewed towards the over-45s but was fairly evenly

King Alfred's body

What a fascinating story about the statue from Trinity Church Square!

However, I would urge caution about the suggestion that it originally came from the Tabard Square temple complex. This site seems to be developing an importance beyond its likely original status, simply because it is in the central London area and so few temples have been found there. A 'major temple complex' is hardly an appropriate description of a place with two rather small Romano-Celtic temples, almost certainly serving the same function as so many others placed near the entrance to urban areas.

If the fragment is Minerva and apparently a statue of some quality (and if that is what Professor Henig thinks, I for one am happy to accept it), then we should indeed expect it at a major temple complex. And if it is Minerva, then the location of that complex is most likely to be associated with the city's forum, together with Jupiter and Juno. London was a major and very Romanised centre, which simply ought to have had something of this kind.

Given the date at which the Alfred statue was made, it seems reasonable to suggest that the Roman part was found

in clearance for development in some part of the city. One thinks of finds like those from some of the bastions, or of the material found reused in the riverside wall.

Finds of this type can often be discovered some distance from their original findspot. Thus the Sibson-cum-Stibbington Minerva mentioned in the note is among a group most likely to have originated from the town at Water Newton (*Durobrivae*) or the major building complex at Castor, both only a few kilometres away.

David Bird
Guildford

PS: The article by Bruce Watson in the same issue was a welcome riposte to Professor Perring's unlikely theory of a 'Hadrianic war' affecting London.

Incidentally, the bashed Walbrook skulls may relate to the amphitheatre, as Watson notes, but perhaps not gladiators so much as condemned criminals forced to take part in events where it was intended that they should die. Gladiators as such seem to have been thought worthy of star status, as many tombstones attest.

distributed in terms of gender. In more qualitative terms, visitors reported a positive experience and were able to draw links between the archaeology featured and their own lives and locality. Artefacts were identified by visitors as being central to this process, as was the presence of knowledgeable and pro-actively engaging archaeologists to contextualise them.

The advance publicity generated by the 2021 programme re-ignited the school's interest in the project when PCA sent them a press release in the summer. As a result, Shane Maher from PCA returned to the school to give a talk and to show the finds in October, using the material prepared for the pop-up.

Conclusions

Although planning conditions in London now regularly include public outreach clauses for major projects, older consents do not have this benefit and only a handful a year have stand-alone detailed outreach conditions. Although the planning solution found in Waltham Forest could not bring back lost archaeology, it did allow for a more ambitious and far-reaching outreach element than could be achieved within the constraints of the project as it was in 2017.

The response to this additional outreach and the digital promotion of it highlights many of the opportunities of this more structured approach to engagement conditions. The rigorous evaluation specified points to further opportunities including additional targeted promotion to expand audiences beyond those with a known interest in archaeology and reach a more diverse London demographic; and an appetite amongst audiences of all ages to better understand the development-led archaeology process and how it drives our understanding of local heritage.

Realising the success, illustrated here, on a modest local scale, but disseminated more widely, and addressing these points in the process, could surely have a huge bearing on current sectoral debates about the wider social relevance and impact of archaeology.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Shane Maher and Helen Hawkins of Pre-Construct Archaeology; Shantol Campbell, Kate Faccia and Alex Blanks of MOLA; and Eshan Hussain of LB Waltham Forest. Jon Pyle of Resilient Edge Architects commissioned the exhibition from PCA and encouraged its implementation.

We would also like to thank the team at The Mill for all their help and support. John Gould and Adam Single were the GLAAS monitors for the site.

BELOW Artefacts such as this Roman Oxfordshire colour-coat bowl, with a white painted scroll decoration, were deemed to be central to the visitor experience (© MOLA)

