

## ANNUAL REPORT: OAKINGTON (UK) 2013 FIELD SCHOOL

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Students excavating a human burial

### GENERAL

The Oakington Field School, located north of Cambridge in the UK, took place between the 15<sup>th</sup> of June and the 15<sup>th</sup> July 2013. This four week program included 11 students from the IFR, two Manchester Metropolitan University students as well as 22 undergraduate students and six Master level students from the University of Central Lancashire. We were also joined by four volunteers, four secondary school students on the 'muddy start program', which provides an introduction to university archaeology, and eight people from the University of Central Lancashire master's degree in publishing who were working on a children's book titled 'Uncovering the Anglo-Saxons'. There were eleven staff and four visiting lectures. Hundreds of school children from around the region visited to see the archaeology and to get involved.

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 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, sieved grave soils, identified and exacted archaeological features, washed and sorted finds, supervised school visits, communicated with the public and participated in organized lectures. In the evenings dinner was delivered but on Thursdays the whole team went to the local pub to eat and to compete against the villagers in a pub quiz. This nicely integrated the large excavation team into a small and quiet village community and gave students and locals the opportunity to talk outside of the formal project setting.

On the second Saturday we were involved in 'village day' an event which attracted hundreds of visitors. Archaeological work was carried out as normal but volunteers wore yellow tee-shirts

and led tours of the excavations, exhibition, or ran the children's activity area. The exhausting day was ended in an entertainment tent with live music and dancing.

## **RESEARCH**

The 2013 field season included two trenches adjacent to the areas investigated in 2010-2012. The first large trench was situated to identify the southern edge of the early Anglo-Saxon cemetery and a series of important middle Saxon ditches which had been observed in earlier geophysics. A number of graves were discovered including a triple burial and an adult male with a healed head wound. We were also very lucky to find a zone of infant graves to the south of the cemetery.

The middle Saxon ditches included more Ipswich ware and imported pottery than have been seen before on this site. This may suggest that Oakington was an important center for trade situated both within regional and international exchange networks. Other later Saxon and medieval features were excavated and demonstrate the changes to land use after the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE when the cemetery and international networks were forgotten and the area became backyards and agricultural land.

Trench 2 was positioned to investigate the surviving settlement evidence. A series of interconnected ditches and postholes were excavated indicating a density of occupation from the 6-8 centuries CE. Pieces of bone comb, metal pins and handmade pottery vessels, with evidence of domestic burning, were found. These support the theory that some of the early settlement was located east of the cemetery.

## **PEDAGOGY**

The Oakington teaching and learning philosophy is one of active pedagogy. We believe in practiced based, hands on learning. Students learn by doing fieldwork and filling in records. This is accomplished by integrating mixed experience groups within the student body. In 2013 we continued to have a high staff to student ratio, and many of the 50 learners were returning students who had picked up key skills. This meant that each new student was always surrounded by experienced people able to provide guidance and acquire leadership experience.

Lectures were integrated into the Oakington project – many by outside scholars visiting the project for that purpose. These included:

- Dr. Ash Lenton, Australia National University, GPS and survey.
- Dr. Alison Klevnäs, Stockholm University, grave robbing in antiquity.
- Alison Card, University of Central Lancashire, Osteoarchaeology.
- Katy Meyers, Michigan State University, digital media.
- Kathrine Felder, University of Cambridge, early Anglo-Saxon artifacts.
- Dr. Faye Simpson, Manchester Metropolitan University, public archaeology.
- Richard Mortimer, Oxford Archaeology East, the archaeology of Oakington.
- Dr. Duncan Sayer, University of Central Lancashire, Oakington Anglo-Saxon cemetery 2013 project update and background.

In the middle of week II, we took a day trip to Sutton Hoo – a famous royal burial site where several ships have been excavated. The visitor's center included reconstructions of the famous Mound One Chamber Grave; visitors can walk into the reconstructed chamber to experience the intimacy of early medieval funerary rituals. We also visited West Stow – the site of a

reconstructed 6<sup>th</sup> century CE village and museum which includes material culture comparable to the Oakington finds.

### **STUDENT CONTRIBUTION**

Oakington is a public archaeology project. Students are invaluable to research work and the learning process is at the heart of the excavation. As a result, students were involved in every task, very quickly the teams were able to work independently and individually pick up excavation, communication and leadership skills. The project was driven by students who took on ownership of the site and its features, producing the all-important records throughout the process. The project is co-directed by university and commercial archaeologists and so a rigorous recording and excavation setup is expected. Although the process may, at first, seem intimidating, students very quickly began to take pride in their work.

### **DISSEMINATION**

The 2013 project received a nice review in the internet blog 'bones don't lie':

<http://bonesdontlie.wordpress.com/2013/07/11/bones-abroad-oakington-dig/>

By invitation burial 109, which was excavated during the village day, was the subject of 'Context', a regular feature showcasing archaeological photography in the magazine *Current Archaeology* – issue 283 October 2013: 42.

During the 2013 field season the first academic paper linked to the Oakington project was published: Sayer, D. & Dickinson, S.D. (2013) Reconsidering Obstetric Death and Female Fertility in Anglo-Saxon England *World Archaeology* 45(2): 285-297 doi:10.1080/00438243.2013.799044.

The European Archaeology Association meeting, Plzen, 2013 saw a presentation by D Sayer and by Dr. Simpson. Dr Sayer's presentation took the Oakington cemetery as a point of departure to discuss the cultural reasons why sites, like Oakington, have more infants than others; Dr Simpson focused her paper on the role and value of digital media within public archaeology using Oakington as a case study to support the use of new technology.