

Conservation

Issue 73: Winter 2014

bulletin

Children and Place



The new National Curriculum wants children to be better connected to the past – which means we need to help teachers and heritage specialists to work together to unlock the stories of historic places.

Students from the Holy Family Catholic School in Walthamstow admire the ornate cast-iron Victorian roof of Leadenhall Market – the London Curriculum uses the capital as a uniquely rich and concrete context for young Londoners to better understand and engage with their city. © Greater London Authority

2 Editorial

3 Places of Childhood

- 3 Children, childhood and cultural heritage
- 5 Wallsend Health Centre
- 6 Understanding historic school buildings
- 8 Historic buildings – modern schools
- 9 A short history of playgrounds
- 11 Beyond the playground
- 13 Diary of a Georgian childhood
- 14 Telling the story of working children

15 Heritage and Education

- 15 Training in Place?
- 16 Historic Places in the National Curriculum
- 18 Cultural Education Partnership Group
- 18 Local natural environments
- 20 Funding heritage education
- 21 What's under *Your School*?
- 22 Place-based learning in schools

24 Place-based Learning

- 24 Heritage in a locally relevant curriculum
- 26 Heritage Schools
- 27 Blackley Forest
- 27 Empty old churches
- 30 What is the London Curriculum?
- 32 Teenagers, archaeology and HEFA
- 34 Place-based learning for schools
- 35 Britain from Above
- 37 Confidence is the key
- 38 Characterising local neighbourhoods
- 39 Encouraging place-based learning
- 41 St Leonard's Church

42 News from English Heritage

44 National Heritage Collections

46 Legal Developments

47 New Publications



ENGLISH HERITAGE

Teenagers, archaeology and the Higher Education Field Academy 2005–11

Carenza Lewis

University of Cambridge

The University of Cambridge Higher Education Field Academy (HEFA) (www.access.arch.cam.ac.uk/schools/hefa) involves teenagers in new archaeological excavations within English rural settlements. While the *research* aim is to reconstruct the development of today's villages, hamlets and small towns, the *social* aim is to raise the educational aspirations of state-educated 13–15-year-olds and instil skills which will help them fulfil those ambitions. HEFA began in 2005, when it was funded by Aimhigher, itself set up in 2003 to increase the number of young people from lower socio-economic groups and disadvantaged backgrounds attending university. HEFA was supported by English Heritage between 2009 and 2011. HEFA's track record since 2005 has enabled it to weather policy U-turns and deep funding cuts, delivering

more than 12,000 learning days to c 4,000 young people interested in subjects ranging from accountancy to zoology. Rigorous monitoring shows that more than 90% of HEFA participants rate it good or excellent and that after completing HEFA, 80% feel more positive about post-16 education, 85% have developed new skills and more than 90% plan to attend university, a rise of 25–60%.

Each HEFA involves around 40 teenagers working for two days in four-person mixed-school teams completing all stages of one of 10 simultaneous 1m² 'test pit' excavations on different sites within a single settlement, most in private gardens volunteered by owners. Learners excavate their pit in 10cm spits, sieving spoil for artefacts, supervised by university archaeologists who brief learners on the archaeological process, identify and contextualise finds and provide encouragement and advice as needed. On the third day, in the University of Cambridge, participants learn about applying to university, experience university life and analyse their finds. Afterwards, they write a report on their



Dr Carenza Lewis, Director of HEFA, with students from Denbigh High School in Luton working on their test pit in a beautifully tended garden in Sharnbrook (Bedfordshire). © Access Cambridge Archaeology

excavation and ultimately receive a detailed assessment of their performance covering the wide range of skills – academic, technical, social and personal – they have developed on HEFA, many of them ‘soft’ skills not included in the school curriculum whose absence can significantly handicap young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. The value of HEFA is reflected in its endorsement by the OCR exam board as a programme which promotes worthwhile learning.

HEFA harnesses the unique capacity of archaeological excavation to enable novices to make discoveries that they know for certain are new – because they themselves have unearthed them. For HEFA participants, this aspect is transformative: many can barely believe they are being entrusted to carry out a ‘real dig’, expecting instead to be excavating some sort of pre-prepared sand pit.

I enjoyed the knowledge that we were working on a genuine excavation with genuine tools and artefacts, rather than an artificial mock-up.

LW, Thorrington 2007

HEFA also benefits from its focus on *place* because participants’ research is about, with and within rural communities. Learners are empowered not only by taking responsibility for excavating (and restoring!) residents’ gardens but also by generating archaeological knowledge which is of interest to their host communities. The fact that the excavations take place in accessible ‘ordinary’ towns, villages, hamlets also brings the experience, and its aspirational impact, closer to HEFA participants’ own daily lives.

It opened my eyes discovering things that have not been touched in hundreds of years just inches beneath the ground.

LW, Thorney 2010

That HEFA can potentially take place in *any* rural settlement enables it to target areas where it is most needed.

Learners’ sense of achievement in completing the physical and mental challenge of excavating a ton or more of spoil against the clock is further enhanced by seeing how the tiny fragments of pottery they have recovered generate distribution maps reconstructing the development over centuries of more than 50 settlements as,

sherd by sherd, they piece the past together

I enjoyed finding out more about the history of Norfolk and knowing that I was a part of discovering it.

AE, Binham 2010

Over ten years, HEFA has capitalised on one of archaeology’s greatest assets – its potential to educate and inspire, not just about ‘heritage’, but much more widely, demographically and geographically, building social capital well beyond typical heritage consumers. In making a proven difference to the lives of thousands of teenagers, HEFA showcases archaeology as a resource and a discipline relevant not just to the past, but also the present and the future. ■

The whole academy was brilliant. I particularly enjoyed how the study of archaeology surprised me. It certainly has inspired me.

RB, Binham 2009

REFERENCES

- Catling, C 2010. ‘Test pits and teaching’. *Current Archaeology* 239 30–5.
- Lewis, C 2007a. ‘New avenues in the investigation of currently occupied rural settlements – preliminary results from the Higher Education Field Academy’. *Medieval Archaeology* 51, 133–64.
- Lewis, C Forthcoming. ‘“Cooler than a trip to Alton Towers”: archaeology, aspiration and the Higher Education Field Academy 2005–2011’. *Public Archaeology* 13.4



Two HEFA students carefully plan a subtle feature showing as a soilmark in their test pit sited in the garden of a moated site in Little Hallingbury (Essex).
© Access Cambridge Archaeology