Skull found during a dig into the past

BY SARAH BREALEY

Experts are unsure whether the woman was a suicide or a criminal who was deliberately buried outside the churchyard, or whether she was buried before the 13th century, when consecrated ground became more important. Other skeletons are likely to be nearby. The skull itself was most likely from between 700 and 1200AD.

Casey, 15, a pupil at Sir John Leman High School in Beccles, was digging with Kirkley High School students Catherine Parnell, 14, and Charlotte Trotter, 15, when they made the discovery late last month.

Casey said: “At first we thought it was a vase. As I went round it a bit more I accidentally stuck my finger in the eye socket – and then Carenza came over and said it was a skull.

“It was really exciting, and also funny in a weird kind of way. “We were just expecting to find pottery and stuff.”

Sonia Barker, head of history at Sir John Leman School, said: “They were just amazed. They were saying ‘that is awesome’. They never expected something like that.”

The two-day trip was designed to teach teamwork and give children a chance to do university-level research. Organisers were delighted that the find shows they are doing original work.

Dr Lewis, director of the higher education field academy at the University of Cambridge, said: “They came and found me and said they had found something round. It was instantly recognisable, a human skull lying in the bottom of the test pit.

“The mostly likely thing is that she was Christian, because she is closest to west. She might well have witnessed Viking raids or the Norman conquest, but she probably would have witnessed the Black Death.”

“We dig hundreds of test pits every year, but this is only the second time we have found human remains – the other was a small piece of toothbone. We have never found a skull before, and we are sure the rest of the body is there.”

The skull has now been buried again, but the university is considering whether to return for a larger dig on the site to see what other bodies might be there, and whether there are any other objects buried with them.