Community digs down into past

CLARE: Neolithic flints among the items found

By Laurence Cawley

FLINTS from the neolithic period and medieval pottery are among items uncovered by budding archaeologists excavating a west Suffolk town.

Recent excavations in Clare have been overseen by former Time Team archaeologist Carenza Lewis as part of a Heritage Lottery Funded scheme.

Test pits have been dug across the town by people of all ages in a bid to piece together the varied history of the town.

About 100 pupils from Clare Middle School have been given the opportunity to get involved with archaeological excavations.

They have been working at 15 separate sites in total.

The pupils spent two days digging test pits of up to a metre deep, 10cm at a time, to uncover the history of changing human activity and settlement in Clare over the centuries.

They got to learn and put to use the skills of professional archaeologists, and a working knowledge of their specialist vocabulary and methods of recording.

This has included using mattocks and other tools.

Assistant headteacher Robert Wheeler said: “Many significant finds were uncovered, including pottery from Victorian and Medieval times, and even worked flints from the Neolithic period.

“It has been a fantastic exercise to learn first hand about local history.

“The pupils thoroughly enjoyed it and really appreciated the opportunity to take part in the project.” During the second phase of the project residents in Clare dug their own gardens by digging test pits.

At the weekend they were supervised by Ms Lewis from Access Cambridge Archaeology, an outreach unit of Cambridge University.

Ms Lewis, a Cambridge archaeology graduate, was asked to be part of the first-ever Time Team back in 1993.

At that stage the Channel 4 series broke new ground in the way archaeology was shown on television.

The project in Clare has been funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and is part of the Stour Valley Landscape Partnership’s ‘Managing a Masterpiece’. Managing a Masterpiece, which was awarded £910,000 by the National Heritage Memorial Fund, started last June and will run for three years.

During that time, the scheme, overseen by representatives from a range of organisations including councils and heritage groups, aims to deliver 62 projects.

During the Middle Ages Clare was a prosperous town whose main trade was clothmaking. Though the pre-Norman invasion period of Clare is sketchy, it is known to have boasted a market from the 11th Century.