A WINDOW was opened into the history of Manuden when archaeological test pits were dug in the lawns of seven gardens in the village.

The work was carried out under the direction of a former member of Channel 4's Time Team programme, Carenza Lewis from Cambridge University's department of archaeology.

The artefacts found included shards of 18th and 19th century red earthenware, slipware and stoneware dating from the 17th century, broken pieces of chamber pots, fragments of clay pipes, pigs' teeth and a slate pencil.

Some 28 Essex students aged between 12 and 16, from schools as far away as Canvey Island, got involved in the field project. They excavated the pits under the guidance of their teachers and Carenza and her team of experts.

Manuden historian Fiona Bengtsen said: “The object of the exercise was not only to find out the origins of the village through unearthing artefacts but also to give the pupils a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to participate in the event.

“It challenged their ability to work in teams of three or four with strangers, as the students from the various schools were mixed up. It also required them to persevere as sometimes the work was demanding and the weather inclement.

“After the turf had been carefully removed and set upon a tarpaulin, a 1m square pit was dug and excavated, 10cm at a time, to a depth of about 1.1 metres or as deep as was feasible in the time allowed.

“The soil was sieved and the artefacts washed and removed for collection.”

She continued: “Some test pits were more productive than others and a lively competition arose between the students at each test pit to see who could find the most artefacts or dig the deepest pit.

“At the end of the day the soil was all returned to the test pit and the turf put neatly back on the top.”