

# Archaeology on your Doorstep III: Peakirk's 'Big Dig' with Carenza Lewis

by Dr Avril Lumley Prior

A ROUND of applause must go to the residents and helpers (some from as far away as Norfolk and Suffolk), who battled inclement weather to join in our 'highly-successful Peakirk 'Dig and Sow' event on Saturday 28 April.

Our gratitude also should go to the valiant band of 'tea ladies' led by Sheila Lever, who produced a steady supply of mouth-watering bacon butties, sandwiches, cakes, scones and welcome hot drinks, and to David Hankins for helping to transform the village hall into our 'Hub', café and museum for the day. Last but not least we must thank former Time-Team presenter, Carenza Lewis, and Ellie Carter, Robert Pacitti and their colleagues for giving us such an enjoyable and memorable day. The idea of a Community Dig was conceived last summer when Gareth Williams unearthed a phenomenal archaeological site in



The Team: Julie Palmer, Robert Pacitti, Ellie Carter and Carenza Lewis

his back garden in St. Pega's Road (Tribune 70, 71). His discovery neatly coincided with my chance meeting with Carenza at Castor, where Access Cambridge Archaeology were sinking a series of metre-square test-pits in order to learn more about the settlements' evolution. When I chatted to her about Peakirk's rich and diverse heritage, she was fascinated and immediately suggested various ways of organising and funding a similar event of our own.

As Gareth's excavations continued to disclose further exciting finds and features, we began to speculate on what lay beneath other gardens in Peakirk. With Carenza's options in mind, telephone calls were made and e-mails exchanged, culminating in a visit from Ellie Carter of Pacitti Landguard Point project, which was set up in conjunction with



New Green lends a hand

Access Cambridge Archaeology and sponsors, Arts Council England, to celebrate the 2012 Cultural Olympiad. Ellie was amazed at what Peakirk had to offer and, subsequently, the village was selected to represent Cambridgeshire as one of only six locations in the East of England to participate in the scheme. Ellie managed the logistics side with aplomb, whilst Gareth, Greg and I enlisted the support of the Parish Council and recruited householders who were prepared to sacrifice their manicured lawns in the name of archaeology. And so, on that extremely wet Saturday, an army of aspiring archaeologists set to work on 22 test-pits, including three on the village green. With a typical 'stiff British upper-lip', we were prepared for anything the elements could throw at us. Turt had been removed the night before and gazebos and tents erected to

afford a little protection from the driving rain. Yet, I heard nobody grumble and it was heart-warming to see whole families working together with grandparents directing and recording, children shovelling and grandchildren scrapping and washing the finds. The enthusiasm and tenacity of the participants never waned and most were rewarded with interesting finds, which offered an insight into how and where their ancestors lived down to 2000 years ago. Sherds of Romano-British Nene-Valley pottery and late Anglo-Saxon Stamford-ware were found mainly near the centre of the village. Broken clay-pipes were prevalent in gardens abutting the railway line, whilst fragments of bottles were discovered close to the site of the Boat Inn on Thorney Road. Many personal items, such as pieces of Victorian porcelain dolls'-heads, a thimble, a slate-pencil, a glass bead and part of an iron bedstead, served as poignant links with the not-too-distant past.

By four o'clock, most of our diggers had reached either the water-table or undisturbed soil and were ready to adjourn to the 'Hub' for a plenary session, during which

Carole Fletcher, Finds' Specialist from Oxford Archaeology East, identified the artefacts and placed them in a Peakirk context. They are now at Cambridge University undergoing analysis. A bound copy of the ensuing report will be presented to the village in November.

But the story does not end here. Before the pits were back-filled, silver-clay charms were 'planted' to commemorate the occasion, thus sowing 'seeds' for future archaeologists to recover. There are 205 unique charms altogether, representing the 205 test-pits across the East of England and the 205 countries competing in the Thirtieth Olympiad.

Moreover, Carenza was so impressed by the quality and variety of the finds, the community spirit and the sterling efforts of all involved that she has invited herself back on Monday 16 and Tuesday 17 July to excavate the test-pits which we were unable to tackle in April. This time, she will be bringing a team of archaeology students to do the spade-work, so hopefully we will be able to stand back and watch more of Peakirk's history unfold.



Singing, dancing, sleving in the rain at the Rookery



The Hutchins family excavate the Green



Greg Prior and Eric Hughes excavate the 'Boat Inn' site



Carenza gets 'hands-on' in Roy and Ann Pettitt's garden



The Lever Family hard at work