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Praise for digs which revealed area's history

An archaeological project which shed new light on Norfolk's past has been praised for bringing communities together.

Dr Clive Bond said the treasure trove of finds from the Gaywood Valley Archaeological Project had proved that "history isn't dead – it is about learning to appreciate the value of our own communities today".

Prominent archaeologists such as Dr Carenza Lewis and Paul Blinkhorn – who both starred in the hit television show Time Team – as well as Dr Mary Chester-Kadwell and Dr David Barrowclough, both from Cambridge University, visited digs in areas such as Fairstead, Gayton, Gaywood, Grimston and Refley.

They gave their expertise as items such as a 10th-century Viking brooch and an Iron Age sword were uncovered in the soil.

However, Dr Bond said the real value of the project had been the way residents had come out to join in the excavations, taking a strong interest in the history of where they live.

"Archaeology is about the community as well as the history," he said. "There was a strong social element and people managed to make new groups of friends."

"We worked with people like the borough council to access land and it was really important to get in touch with those communities."

Dr Bond said the digs allowed people to find out more about the

Andrew Papworth

andrew.papworth@archant.co.uk

history of their village and, in some cases, a "very personal history" of their own gardens and homes.

Many of the finds were discovered in 1m x 1m test pits dug in people's gardens, as well as the grounds of community centres.

In one case, a second world war air raid shelter was found but there were also finds which revealed that people had settled in west Norfolk earlier than many had first thought.

For example, a Germanic token unveiled Great Massingham's Hanseatic links, while a flint hand-axe circa 400,000BC was found in Fairstead.

A celebration weekend with presentations at Marriott's Warehouse was held to mark the project, along with an exhibition held at True's Yard Fisherfolk Museum, in King's Lynn, to show off some of the items found during the year-long programme.

The project was funded by a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. While the funding was for a year-long programme of events, Dr Bond is hopeful more funding can be found for future digs.

Are you organising a community project in west Norfolk? Contact Andrew Papworth on 01553 778681, email andrew.papworth@archant.co.uk



■ Dr Mary Chester-Kadwell and Dr Clive Bond at an exhibition of finds from the Gaywood Valley Archaeological and Historical Project.

Picture: IAN BURT