

Enfield Archaeological Society Supplementary Archive Report

Broomfield Park Excavation Public Outreach Report: May 2025

by
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Introduction

This report details the outreach programme associated with an archaeological excavation in Broomfield Park, Enfield, which was commissioned from Enfield Archaeological Society (EAS) by John Cole, LBE Community Engagement Officer. The excavation was part of the LBE 'Unlocking Broomfield for the Community' initiative, supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and drew on a project design produced by EAS in November 2024. The site represents part of the former gardens of the Grade II* listed Broomfield House. The excavation, which took place on 26th-27th April and 3rd-5th May 2025, was undertaken with the aim of improving understanding of the development, plan and chronology of the gardens around the house. Specifically, the intention was to find, examine and hopefully date the remains of a water channel or 'canal' which may have formed a part of the garden in the 18th century and is to some extent still visible as a grass mark in the park today. A requirement for several levels of public interaction and involvement was built into the project.

A full excavation report is available at <https://www.enfarchsoc.org/reports/>.



The trench across the water channel, gets under way (photo John Pinchbeck)

The Outreach Programme

The public outreach element of the project fell into three parts.

A significant focus of the activities of Enfield Archaeological Society, which includes professional archaeologists as well as highly experienced amateurs among its members, is on *professional archaeology done by the community* and at some of the Society's excavation sites the team will include individuals who are taking part in archaeological fieldwork for the first time. At this site around 40% of the participants were new diggers, providing a beneficial experience for them while hopefully helping the Society to build up its team for the future.



Regular and new volunteers explore the water channel (photo Neil Pinchbeck)

‘As a first timer the Broomfield project was a perfect intro into the world of archaeology. The experts were super helpful and friendly and this has certainly inspired us to participate in future events’.

‘I felt welcomed and supported on this my first dig. Learnt so much in a short period of time. Just wish I had the courage to join a dig sooner than I did because it was fun. Will be back!’

The excavation site was very central to the park, so that throughout the five days of the excavation – and indeed on the setting-up and closing-down days – there was a constant stream of local people watching the archaeologists at work, asking them questions and studying the comprehensive information panels fixed to the fence surrounding the excavation area. Indeed a couple of family groups brought their refreshments with them and sat down near the digging area to be able to keep an eye on developments.



The excavation begins to attract visitors (photo John Pinchbeck)

Throughout the digging period, a large funfair was operating in a separate area of the park, which, along with the fine weather, contributed to the flow of people finding their way to the excavation area. Publicity about the dig and the opportunities for taking part was directed through social media, as well as the EAS and 'Unlocking Broomfield' websites and was picked up by other local outlets. Information about the dig was also publicised in Hazelwood School's parents' newsletter.

Secondly, a link was made with Hazelwood Primary School, one of the nearest schools to the park, allowing members of the archaeological team to work with a single year group to share some of the information about the excavation with the children.

The third element of outreach was an Open Day on the second Saturday of the dig, which had been timed to fall on a bank holiday weekend, with maximum potential for attracting members of the public.

School involvement

Staff found it informative and the children enjoyed handling the artefacts.

Hazelwood Primary School enthusiastically accepted the invitation from John Cole, LBE Community Engagement Officer, to become involved with the ‘Unlocking Broomfield’ initiative and teachers developed their own study programme based on the chronology of Broomfield House and park, focussing on the history curriculum for Year 5:

History: Unlocking Broomfield

In this local history unit, the children will look at the history of Broomfield House and Broomfield Park, investigating why it is significant and how it has impacted upon our world today. The children will have the opportunity to visit the park on multiple occasions, firstly to see how archaeologists are excavating the site of the old house and what archaeologists do first-hand, but also to re-tread the steps of history in the park, discussing how it has changed through time.

The children in Year 5 (around 90 in all) visited the excavations on Friday 2nd May and two members of the EAS team, Neil Pinchbeck and Judith Stones, were there to welcome them and tell them the story of the site.

As there was at that stage only a single trench open and it was not large, teachers were asked to bring the children in groups of around 15 at a time. Each group spent about 15 minutes sitting beside the trench listening, discussing, asking questions and handling original artefacts – the timing was deliberately kept short to maximise concentration and maintain a level of interest. Because the visit took place on a day when excavation was not taking place, it was possible to allow the children into the actual excavation area, which in general is not accessible to the public, for safety reasons.



Judith explains excavation technique to Hazelwood pupils (photo Neil Pinchbeck)

The session with the children around the trench offered them a chance to identify the various tools that the archaeologists had used to excavate it; to observe what the trench had revealed and to confirm the view of the archaeologists that they had discovered the base and both sides of the water channel which they had been searching for. A specially prepared watercolour artist's impression of Broomfield House and gardens around the year 1730 was a very effective way of setting the trench and its contents in context. The children also handled and were helped to classify a selection of the artefacts which had been found in the trench, including 19th-century and earlier pottery and fragments of clay smoking pipes.



Some of the finds the pupils were able to handle (photo Neil Pinchbeck).

Going beyond history and archaeology, the session touched on maths when the groups were asked to estimate the depth of the canal; and also on safety and risk-management which are fundamental to archaeological fieldwork.

On 14th May, Neil and Judith spent an hour with Year 5 at the school, this time meeting each of the three classes (about 30 children) individually. It was a chance to recap what they had derived from their site visit, as well as to update them on what had been found in the days that followed.



At Hazelwood School, Neil explains what the archaeology revealed (photo Judith Stones)

Using an overlay on the artist's impression, it was possible for the children to see the difference between the shape and construction of the channel on the original image (based to some extent on speculation) and the nature of the channel as found (based on reality). This provided a useful understanding of the way in which archaeologists set up hypotheses, test them on the ground and then alter their interpretations accordingly. The class also had a closer look at some of the artefacts found on site and began to understand the stories that even small fragments can tell. The prevalence of 19th-century transfer-printed pottery gave them a glimpse of

the beginnings of mass production, while soot marks on the exterior of earlier red wares demonstrated that they had been used for cooking on an open fire.

Like almost everyone else who visits an archaeological site, when they came to Broomfield Park the children had asked whether any ‘treasure’ had been found. It was hardly ‘treasure’, which is remarkably rare and not really what archaeology is about, but shortly after their visit a 2p piece, dated 1982 was revealed. So the children were able to look at that and handle it, comparing it with a genuine ‘cartwheel’ two penny piece, from a private collection, dated 1797, so within the period when the Broomfield water gardens were in use.

Open Day

As indicated above, local people were encouraged to watch the archaeologists at work and talk to them throughout the dig, but the Open Day on Saturday 3rd May was an opportunity to focus more intensively on public awareness.



Archaeological Open Day welcomes visitors (photo Martin J. Dearne)

A stall was set up to allow people of all ages to interact with the results of the dig, local archaeology and history and members of Enfield Archaeological Society. There were around 210 visitors during the day (10.30 am to 4pm). Particularly popular were the sand-pit mini-digs packed with genuine pottery fragments, animal bones and clay pipes from the Tudor and later periods (from a different site), which were ‘excavated’ again and again by enthusiastic children of all ages.



Children's sand pit dig at the Open Day (photo Mervyn Maggs)

‘The opportunity for my 3-year-old to dig safely and get her hands on some real finds was invaluable for engaging her curiosity and introducing history in a way that storybooks can’t compare to. She’s still asking us when we’re going digging again!’

‘This is such a good idea. I think I’m going to try it at home....but it will never be as fascinating without the real old artefacts to find’.

Also on the stall was a selection of more complete pottery vessels and other artefacts from medieval and later London for visitors to handle and puzzle over, along with a couple of objects found in recent days on the Broomfield site. EAS colleagues were kept busy answering questions about the history of the house and park and local history and archaeology in general. Some of the families who came were from Hazelwood School, including several of the Year 5 children who had visited the site a few days before.

Conclusions

As a result of the dig and its embedded outreach, a minimum of 350 people of all ages engaged at first hand with the ‘Unlocking Broomfield’ initiative, gained a greater appreciation of the heritage of Broomfield Park and House and had the chance to discuss the developments they would like to see in the future. A presence on social media and the posting of the full excavation report on the EAS website is continuing to extend that awareness more widely.

From the point of view of the EAS, participation in the Unlocking Broomfield initiative provided a much-appreciated opportunity to welcome new members and to make the Society, as well as the history and archaeology of Enfield, more widely known.

Acknowledgements

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(photo Mervyn Maggs)