

# Building Sustainability in Community Archaeology: The Hendon School Archaeology Project

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The Hendon School Archaeology Project is a collaboration between Hendon School, the Hendon and District Archaeological Society (HADAS) and the UCL Institute of Archaeology. It aims to provide students at the school with an experience and understanding of archaeological fieldwork, while investigating an important multi-period site. This paper outlines the results of the first five years of the project: both the archaeological findings, and as an innovative collaborative form of community archaeology. The principal focus of research is the 16th-century residence of John Norden, cartographer to Elizabeth I; however, the most significant discovery to date is a substantial ceramic assemblage of 12th- to 14th-century date. As community archaeology, an important aspect is the sustainability of the project, based on cost and resource sharing between the project partners, which we believe may offer a useful model for other such initiatives.

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Community archaeology is a strong and diverse field of practice in British archaeology. The projects within this broad category range widely in their scale and longevity and include excavations, landscape surveys, archival projects and field schools.<sup>1</sup> Some of these are initiated and led by professionals employed in museums, commercial units and universities: these are characterized as 'top-down' community archaeology in contrast to 'bottom-up' projects driven by community groups, schools and other organisations.<sup>2</sup> One of the greatest drivers of the recent growth in both types of community archaeology has been the availability of grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund. However, despite this boost, there has been a marked difficulty in creating sustainable

community archaeology projects that survive beyond the initial funding period. The aim of this paper is to discuss some of the positive factors affecting sustainability that we have identified in the (non-HLF funded) Hendon School Archaeology Project that we initiated in 2006 and which is now in its sixth year.<sup>3</sup> Our analysis focuses in particular on the strength and flexibility that can emerge from carefully wrought collaborations between people and institutions with complementary needs, abilities and resources.

The Hendon School Archaeology Project has run since 2006 as a collaboration between Hendon School, the Hendon and District Archaeological Society (HADAS) and UCL Institute of Archaeology. With fieldwork timed to coincide with the last weeks of the school year the project has aimed to provide students at the school with the opportunity to experience and learn about archaeological ideas and methods within the school environment and to learn about the ground beneath

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**Fig. 1:** Andrew Coulson of HADAS and Sarah Dhanjal explaining the site and the finds, at Hendon School, to parents of some of our student participants.

their feet (**Fig. 1**).<sup>4</sup> The school, including the school sports-fields where the excavations take place, is built on the site of the gardens of a large 16th-century house. To date, the educational and archaeological outcomes of the project have been extremely positive.

The project was instigated by Maria Phelan, an Institute of Archaeology alumna then working as a student services assistant at Hendon School, and Sarah Dhanjal and Jenny Stripe, then employed by the Institute to work on Widening Participation and Diversity. The initial aim was to use archaeological excavations of the school playing-field as an activity for young people deemed at risk of social exclusion; ultimately, the first year of the project included students from this group as well as some identified as 'gifted and talented' – an unlikely, but surprisingly successful, combination. In subsequent years the student participants have been selected by the school from the student body as a whole.

### Hendon House and Hendon School

Hendon School is a state secondary school located near Brent Street, Hendon, in the London Borough of Barnet. The core buildings of Hendon School date to 1914, built on the site of an earlier building demolished in 1909. On the front wall of the school is a blue plaque claiming that the school sits on the site of Hendon House, home of the cartographer John Morden (1548–1625). In fact, as map regression work and a little historical research have shown, Hendon House stood a short distance to the west of the school entrance, and the school building and playing-field sit on what was the garden of the house. Moreover, the Elizabethan cartographer and author of *Speculum Britanniae* was named Norden, not Morden, and there remains some doubt as to whether the large house on Brent Street was in fact the formidable structure with sixteen hearths that he referred to as his 'poore house in Hendone'.<sup>5</sup>

The house, a gabled structure, was built sometime in the 16th century. From 1660 to 1677 it was the home of Jeremy Whichcote, Solicitor General to the Elector Palatine and later Governor of Fleet Prison. In 1691, the Whichcotes sold the house to Sir William Rawlinson, a Commissioner of the Great Seal, and later owners included John Cornwall, a Director of the Bank of England, and the retired soldier Major General Christopher Fagan. In the mid-19th century the house served as a private mental institution and, following a period as a derelict property, it was finally demolished in 1909 to make way for the school.

### Research aims

In the original project design a set of research questions was formulated based on the history of Hendon House and the site – and on the work HADAS has carried out in the area since the early 1960s:

1. Is there any residual evidence of pre-historic activity?
2. Considering the proximity to various Roman roads, is there evidence of Roman activity?
3. Excavations in the area have uncovered considerable Anglo-Saxon material; is there any evidence of similar remains here?
4. Is there any evidence of activity in the area between its mention in Domesday and the construction of the house?
5. What evidence remains for the different phases of the rebuilding of the house up to the demolition in 1909?

These five research questions have formed the basis of our analyses of the results of the first five years of fieldwork at Hendon School.

### Archaeological education

The principal aim of the project was to provide students at the school with an opportunity to learn about and practice archaeology, with training in field skills backed up by classroom sessions. The participating

students were selected by the school and some assisted with the preliminary resistivity survey conducted on the site which failed to provide clear indications of structures or landscaping. The pre-excitation sessions in the first years of the project focused on two elements: firstly, the historical background to the project, taught using maps, resistivity results and historical information from documents; and secondly, teaching stratigraphy and the importance of excavation by context through ‘fishtank archaeology’, the construction and excavation of imaginary archaeological sites in clear Perspex boxes.

Initially, the focus of our educational activity on site was excavation. The chance for the pupils to experience practical archaeology was an expressed desire of Hendon School. Other activities offered on site, in an informal manner, include finds processing, resistivity, using a theodolite for leveling and the responsible use of metal-detectors. Over the first four years, the activities offered varied due to the different excavation staff and their specialisms. In year four, following an exercise in critical reflection on our work up to that point, we decided to transform the ‘experience’ element of the project into a more formal field-school model so that individual team members could contribute to the educational element in a more organized and structured manner. The field school was taught using a specially compiled handbook which covers stratigraphy, finds processing and drawing, photography, surveying and plan and section drawing (**Fig. 2**). The structure worked well for both the excavation staff and the pupils, due to its clarity and strong educational focus.

### Field seasons: 2006–10

In each of 2006, 2007 and 2010 we excavated for one week at Hendon School, and then for two weeks in both 2008 and 2009, with field teams comprising school students, HADAS members and UCL students. During these first five years of the project over 100 school students were given the opportunity

to learn about, and experience, archaeology and archaeological fieldwork (**Fig. 3**). In that time seven trenches were excavated around the perimeter of the school playing-field. With regard to our research aims, the findings have been variable: (1) no evidence of the prehistoric period was found, whereas for (2) the Romans and (5) the phases of building and rebuilding of Hendon House, we have only trace finds: abraded pot sherds in the first case and fragments of glazed tile in the second. Evidence for (3) the Anglo-Saxons in Hendon is also fairly meagre, although it is still unclear how much of the medieval ceramic might date to this period. The most substantial advance has been in (4) the activity on the site between the mention of *Handone* in Domesday and the construction of Hendon House in the late 16th century. In the 2010 season, a 2 x 0.5m sondage in the main excavation, to a depth of only 25cm, revealed a sealed context with a post-hole containing two iron nails and an assemblage of 117 sherds of medieval ceramic, most dating from 1170-1350. This is one of the largest assemblages of material from this date ever discovered in the area and to have found it in such a tiny space (0.25 cubic metres of earth), in association with a possible structural element, is extremely interesting and has informed our future plans for work on the site.

### The problem of sustainability

The Hendon School Archaeology Project forms a central part of a wider programme of archaeological education projects in the Barnet area conducted or supported by HADAS and UCL Institute of Archaeology, with a variety of partners, within the general category of British community archaeology. The growth of community archaeology and heritage projects in Britain in recent years has led to the emergence of a small but growing body of professional community archaeologists, most working as independent consultants but some employed by museums and heritage bodies. The strengthening and gradual



**Fig. 2:** Hendon School students learning about archaeological plan drawing with Sarah Dhanjal and Angela Holmes of HADAS.



**Fig. 3:** Hendon School students excavating their playing-field.

professionalization of community archaeology has rightly led to calls for greater evaluation and critique of its most common forms, both in terms of their actual versus claimed impacts and the value for money that they represent.

A common problem in community archaeology – and one that the Hendon School Archaeological Project has addressed – is how to create an initiative that can be sustained over a relatively long period of time. Sustainability is key to the growth of community archaeology for a number of reasons: it allows practitioners to develop their skills and techniques; it creates a deeper and more lasting impact on the community in which it is based; it allows for more in-depth evalua-

tion of the material in question; and, arguably, it demonstrates the success and value of the project to all concerned. However, sustainability in community archaeology is difficult to secure for a number of reasons. Many projects are founded with start-up funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund which, since its establishment in 1994, has distributed around £4.5 billion to more than 30,000 heritage projects across the UK. This support, while vital to the existence of many projects, is time limited and, in some cases, it has proved extremely difficult for projects that began in this way to find alternative sources after the initial funding period. Similarly, the professionalization of community archaeology, as with all aspects of archaeology, relies on often unreliable and temporary income sources, and several posts have disappeared. In this climate of short-term funding and support, it is worth analysing a project such as that at Hendon School to ascertain the factors which have enabled it to survive – and thrive – for five years and to continue into the foreseeable future. While we are proud of our project, we recognize that many much larger and longer-lived projects exist in Britain and elsewhere; nonetheless, we believe that our necessarily internal perspective and insights on this project will be of some value and interest within community archaeology.

### **Funding**

Funding is one of the most difficult elements in the construction of community archaeology projects and probably the most important factor in their sustainability. From the outset, the Hendon School Archaeology project has kept costs to a minimum, with the biggest expenses in community archaeology – such as equipment, labour and expertise – being provided ‘in kind’ by HADAS and UCL. In terms of funding, the project began with a small amount of money from the school, allocated for programmes for ‘gifted and talented’ students in the first year, and with funding from the UCL Widening Participation Unit during the first three years. Some of

the money made available by UCL was used to purchase individual, 4in, WHS trowels for the students to use during the project and to keep at the end. As well as the loan of equipment such as hand-tools, wheelbarrows and surveying equipment, HADAS has covered the cost of consumables, such as drawing materials, finds trays and finds bags. On reflection, while this model has proved sustainable during the project, we believe that it would have been advantageous to have formalized the division of costs at an early stage in the development.

### **The partnership**

The core strength of the project from the start has been the partnership between the three organisations: Hendon School, HADAS and UCL Institute of Archaeology. This partnership is undoubtedly, at least in part, a result of the individuals involved, although over the years several people have withdrawn from the project or been unable to take part in a particular year’s work, including all three authors of this paper at various times. Hendon School, as the instigator of the project, has maintained a sense of ownership that exemplifies the benefits of ‘bottom-up’ community archaeology as opposed to ‘top-down’ projects driven by archaeologists. Since the second year, teacher Jill Hickman has managed the school’s end of the project, including recruitment and selection of student participants, and head-teacher Kevin McKellar has been a strong supporter of the project from the start.

The role of HADAS has been vital in the foundation and continuing survival of the project. The loan of equipment and payment for archaeological consumables, as described above, is vital to the project’s survival and is a concrete result of HADAS’ commitment to education and outreach, in addition to its general activities of fieldwork, organized trips, training courses and lectures. Of equal or greater importance is the participation of HADAS field-team members in the excavations at Hendon School, bringing not



only their skills and labour, but also a strong knowledge of the history and archaeology of Hendon. HADAS is an independent local archaeological society, one of many similar organisations across the country with similar resources. What distinguishes HADAS, in this case, is their willingness to work in partnership and devote resources to create participatory education projects in the region which they study.

The Institute of Archaeology became involved in the project due to the existence of a Widening Participation and Diversity Officer post in the department – one that no longer exists. The pattern of UCL involvement established from the start was the provision of undergraduate, masters and PhD students as volunteer supervisors and diggers, co-ordinating the excavation, finds processing and training elements. The project provided these students with experience in archaeological education under the tutelage and supervision of Sarah Dhanjal, initially in her role as Widening Participation and Diversity Officer and later as a professional community archaeologist donating her time for free. Several of the UCL students involved have become committed volunteer community archaeologists participating in a range of projects. Alongside labour and expertise, the Institute of Archaeology affiliation has given the project a visibility and prestige witnessed in its local press coverage and visits by the local MP (**Fig. 4**). This also serves the wider purpose of encouraging students at the school to consider working towards applying to go to university.

The key elements that emerge in examining the partnership at the basis of the Hendon School Archaeology Project, and its role in creating sustainability, are: strong and committed institutions; key individual contacts within each of the partners, whose roles are clearly defined and can be passed on to others as necessary; optimal use of the resources which each partner can provide; and a generosity of time, effort and resources on all parts. Further, we maintain that this



**Fig. 4:** Sarah Dhanjal and Jill Hickman of Hendon School explaining the site to Andrew Dismore, Labour MP for Hendon 1997–2010 and Chairman of the Trustees of the Council for British Archaeology London Group.

particular combination of partners – a community partner (in this case the school), a local archaeological society and a university department – is a strong and easily replicable pattern in community archaeology elsewhere.

#### **Hendon School Archaeology Project: the future**

While we had discussed making the fifth year of work at Hendon School the last, the discovery of an archaeologically significant assemblage of medieval ceramics has encouraged a rethink, alongside the school's stated desire for the project to continue. A number of elements of the project have evolved over the years and we are keen to keep developing the project in new directions. The nature of the school-student experience is a key element of this: we are keen to move away from large groups gaining minimal experience

and move towards working with smaller, selected groups able to participate more fully and thus gain a more rounded experience. In practice this has not always been possible, not least due to the school's desire for as many students as possible to experience archaeology. While many of the students who participated in the early stages have left the school, it would be interesting for the three partner organisations to attempt an evaluation of the impact of the project over its first five years: its strengths and weaknesses; its value to the various participants; and their aims and intentions for its future. We anticipate that the Hendon School Archaeology Project will continue to provide value to all of us involved in it, and we hope that the model of collaborative working embodied by it might prove to be useful to other groups and organisations.

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