

## The Carlton Dig

Speech to Market Bosworth Rotary, Oct 18<sup>th</sup> 2022

Mr President, ladies and gentlemen

My talk today is about the Carlton Dig, you may have read about it in the Aspect, or Graphic, an archaeological dig to determine the history of the village, organised by Bosworth Links.

In the summer we had a flyer through the letterbox, inviting us to a meeting in our church hub, to see if we might be interested in being involved in digging test pits to determine who our predecessors were and what they had left behind.

Nigel Palmer of the Market Bosworth Society, who many of you will know, introduced Matthew Morris of ULAS, University of Leicester Archaeology Services, to make his presentation,

The Bosworth Society had obtained a lottery grant of over £100,000 from the Heritage Lottery fund, on the back of a previous exercise in Bosworth, which some of you may have been involved in.

Matthew showed us pictures of some of the test pits from the Bosworth dig, together with some finds, which as well as medieval and Roman artefacts, showed iron age habitation.

Matthew needed about 14 pits to make the project viable, and in the end villagers signed up for 20 pits. We had to sign to hand over any finds, but were told if there was a gold hoard it would be covered by different jurisdiction. The pits varied in location, some in people's front gardens, like Peter Gannon's, some on the village green, one in the pub beer garden. We had one in the front garden, and one at the back near the public footpath, which some of you will have walked.

We were then invited to a masterclass, again in the hub, by Peter Liddle, the County Archaeologist, who showed all the different finds we might come across, and how to identify them. I had difficulty telling the difference between a medieval shard and a Roman shard.

We had nice lady called Gemma who pulled it all together come and view the suitability of the plots with Matthew, making notes and sketches on a busy clipboard.

They came back on the Friday afternoon before the dig with a metre square template and red spray paint to draw exactly where each hole was to be dug, and a large arrow pointing roughly north.

Then the big day, September 10<sup>th</sup>, 6 weeks ago.

Again, we had to report to the Hub, 9 o'clock in the morning, to register, and then listen attentively to the briefing – how to dig a hole. I have spent the last 65 years digging holes, but soon realised that some people didn't know – strip the turf off in squares and lay it out

like an exact mosaic on the ground. Spread a plastic sheet out, fix a six inch nail at each of the four corners and tie string around each side. Strip the top soil off and store at the end of the sheet and then dig down in 100mm layers, and put in a bucket. Then there was all the health and safety stuff as well.

Each pit had a number, ours were 9 & 10.

They then called out the names of the excavating teams for each pit.

Our number 9 team were two ladies who seemed very seasoned archaeology diggers, who knew what they were doing, our friend Ian from the 1<sup>st</sup> responders, and a girl from the Dixie, they had been recruiting there.

No 10 down the bottom was well off the road, and safe for little kids, and we had a lovely family. The granny, who was very much in charge, the matriarch, her daughter and son in law, and their kids, and the son and his wife, and their kids.

We came out of church, and there, either side of the path were 20 piles of kit:-

Plastic sheet, Tape measure, 4 nails, 5m of string, mattock, spade, pointing up trowel, bucket, sieve, finds tray

The weather was perfect, and everyone was very enthusiastic, and set off digging with vigour.

As homeowners we could do as little or as much as we liked. As you can imagine, I spent most of my time walking about, talking to everyone, and peering down holes, which of course is what I did at the Gas Board.

A lovely lady called Marion was on continuous tea duty, so there was always a cuppa when you went round to church to see how they were getting on in there

The turf came off, then the topsoil, and the serious digging began, filling buckets for the siever to sieve, and put anything remotely significant into the finds tray. A collector then came and emptied the tray, and took the finds into church, where a team of washers was set up. They washed the finds ready for inspection, keeping the pit number and depth recorded, followed by an identifier who discounted rubbish and put a period and description, and a magic number specific to our pit. This was then bagged and labelled ready to go off to Leicester to be examined by the ULAS experts.

Come 5 o'clock everyone went home, so after tea I went and tidied the hole up, giving it straight sides like a proper test pit, showing the strata going down. This was particularly interesting as we had found an old road consisting of cobbles and Carlton stone. Richard Liddington then identified this as the Green Lane on the 1834 ordnance survey map

Working with a mattock in a metre square hole was a bit awkward, so early the Sunday morning I set to with my small pick axe, and fetched the rest of the cobbles out, filling my wheelbarrow, so the family could have a fresh start at 9 o'clock

I had lent them a garden bench for them to sit on between shifts, and enjoy their picnics. If you can imagine the four little kids sat on the bench eating crisps, with Baylee our Golden Retriever sat in front of them drooling, he had a wonderful weekend.

The experts kept coming round to look at us, and tell us what had been identified. Matthew was rather pleased with the Roman Grey Ware. Carol, our Granny asked him what was the most exciting thing he had found. He looked at her and said quietly – Richard III. She looked aghast and said oo where you there? To which he replied – yes, I was in charge.

If you have been to see the new film, The Lost King, you will see that Matthew Morris was side kick to Richard Buckley, the ULAS director, and was indeed in charge of the dig!

The kids kept wanting to go off exploring, so I sent them next door, where Trevor had offered a test pit in his Christmas tree plantation, where more signs of the track had been found. I told the dad to take the kids to see the llamas at Bosworth Mill, following the footpath and yellow posts. I hadn't realised that the furthestmost post had been obscured by the hedge.

By this time they had acquired more children, and a little girl stood in front of me and said: Bill, I said yes my duck, she said do you know where these llamas are, I said yes I do, she said well will you take us then please, so off we went with the dog, and 6 children in tow. I felt like the Pied Piper of Hamelin. Through the Christmas tree field and into Dobson's grass field. Unfortunately there were some cows in the field, and suddenly we were down to four. You can imagine my consternation until I was told the Braydon's dad had followed, and taken him and his sister back. We carried on through the stubble field until we could see the two daddy llamas. They stood erect, flaring their white chests, swearing and spitting at us. The kids stood on the gate with glee, they had all got a story to tell.

Come 3 o'clock everyone started clearing up. The holes had to be back filled, turf replaced in the mosaic that it came out, with the arrow still pointing north, and all the equipment returned to the churchyard, ready for the debriefing session. They were very pleased with the finds, far more than they expected, in our pits they found bits of medieval pottery, and the piece of Roman grey ware

All the finds have been taken to the labs at Leicester Uni, and a report will be issued in February, detailing each pit, and concluding the understanding of Carlton through the ages, together with the video that Bill Newsinger had been working on all weekend.

The weekend was rounded off by a barbeque in Chris Peat's paddock, using the marquee that we had put up the previous Thursday.

This rounded off a wonderful weekend that was enjoyed by everybody involved.

Bill Sharp