

Ancient ruins uncovered in Village

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First substantial Roman find in Walthamstow

It turns out the Village has been up and coming for longer than was previously thought after archeologists uncovered prehistoric and Roman remains in the grounds of a local school. The



discovery – a first of its kind in the area – revealed the remains of a substantial Roman building or buildings that were probably part of a wealthy Roman farmstead.

“No prehistoric or Roman remains of any substance had previously been found in Walthamstow and so to get such a substantial building was very surprising,” according to archeologist and project manager, Helen Hawkins, who has been leading the excavation. Hawkins says the discovery was also unexpected as the site is not near any known Roman roads, the closest being at Leyton.

The possibility that the grounds of the Holy Family Catholic School – which abuts Vinegar Alley – might contain ancient secrets came to light in 2009 when a planning application for new buildings was submitted. Because the site was within an archeological priority area, trial trenching was carried out, which exposed tantalising clues.

“The trenching uncovered ditches and pits dating to prehistoric times, early Roman and late Roman periods, as well as a piece of Purbeck marble and some flue tiles, which suggested that a high status Roman building with underfloor heating was located on or near the site,” says Hawkins. But when the building project was cancelled, further investigations were put on hold. It wasn’t until last year when the school revived the building project that a ground penetrating radar survey was carried out, which identified extensive remains on the site. That’s when the company Hawkins works for was brought in to continue the search. They didn’t have to dig very deep before making their startling find. “The remains were located about 30 to 40 centimetres below the ground,” says Hawkins, “so they have only survived because nothing was previously constructed on the site.”

The oldest remains were a prehistoric ring ditch, which Hawkins says was probably a defensive ditch and bank constructed around small roundhouse dwellings. But those remains were only the start.

“After the ring ditch went out of use,” says Hawkins, “a very large Roman building or group of buildings was then constructed on the site. The buildings, which would have had good views of the surrounding valleys, were made of timber, wattle and daub and probably comprised a large wealthy farmstead. We have found evidence of flue tiles, which may suggest that a bath house formed part of the complex, although we haven’t found any evidence for the

bath house itself as yet.” And while comparable isolated Roman farmsteads have been located at Leyton and Wanstead, this is a first for Walthamstow.

But Hawkins and her team have not just found the remains of buildings; the investigation has also yielded Roman and prehistoric pottery and so far, one Roman coin. And there could be more to come as the excavations are scheduled to continue on the site until later this spring.

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Walthamstow Village Residents' Association

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