

Children at Oxfordshire school stumble across medieval path during taster session in archaeology

Pupils unearth the past

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IT WAS only supposed to be a mini-excavation to give students a taste of archaeology — but a dig at Wheatley Park School uncovered far more than was bargained for.

Three pupils — George Walker, Callum Smith and Michael Bignell — admitted they were growing a little bored with the class, having only found rusty nails and broken pottery, when they stumbled across what seems to be part of a path dating back to the early 1300s.

The school site in Holton, near Wheatley, is known to be steeped in history, but headteacher Kate Curtis said her students had not been expecting to find anything.

Year-nine pupil Michael, 14, said: "We were just using spades and digging down when we hit something really hard. We realised there was something big down there so started using the trowel to get closer to it.

"It was then we saw the cobbles in a pattern and knew we'd found something special."

The archaeology exercise was only supposed to be part of an activity day at the school which would see pupils spend an hour or two learning about excavation before moving on to arts and crafts activities.

But the find captured the pupils' imagination and led to them spending most of the afternoon at the site.

George, also 14, said: "It was pretty exciting to find. To start with we thought it might just be a large clump of rock, but we called over our teacher who looked at it, made some checks and said it was part of a medieval road or pathway.

"Up until then all we'd found was a lot of rubbish."

Callum, 13, added: "We had actually just been joking about what we might find when we made the discovery."

The find measured about six feet by three feet and is now due to be inspected by English Heritage.

Headteacher Kate Curtis said: "We were not expecting the students to find anything, but they have actually uncovered something which we think dates back to the 14th century. It certainly looks impressive.

"We knew our site had a lot of historic interest, but we were not expecting to make a find like this."

Teacher Kevin Heritage, a keen archaeologist, was leading the class when the students made the discovery.



■ **YOUNG AND OLD:** Above: Pupils and teachers from Whealey Park School and the medieval path. Below: Oliver Cromwell

Order no: 120707721. Picture: Mark Bass

He said: "It is a pretty good site to do archaeology on, but we didn't expect anything like this. It's a virtually complete medieval trackway from Holton village up to a moated site at the school. It's very impressive."

This is not the first archaeological find at Wheatley Park School.

A mosaic tile also thought to date back to medieval times was found a few weeks ago and the park site has a colourful history.

In the 1640s, Oliver Cromwell had his Civil War headquarters at a castle and manor house on the site.

His daughter Bridget later married there.

Although the manor house was demolished, parts of the original park, such as the castle's moat, remain around the school.

