Worcester Library and History Centre: community excavations and public programme at The Butts, Worcester - August to October 2008

Justin Hughes

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Report 1701
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1. Background

A joint development team comprising Worcester City Council, Worcestershire County Council and the University of Worcester are in the preparatory stages of constructing a new Library and History Centre at The Butts, to the immediate north of the medieval town of Worcester. The planning stage of this multi-million pound building programme included funding for a large, ten week community excavation and public programme. The following report describes Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Service’s commissioned community programme, which, between August and October 2008, ran alongside its mitigation works, to be completed in advance of the Centre’s construction. The report summarises the Service’s work with volunteers, schools, visiting groups and the media. It is illustrated with descriptions of Worcester’s known historic past and by a sample of the archaeological features and artefacts unearthed during the excavation.
2. **Advertising and marketing**

Excavations and building recording at The Butts is a prequel to the site being developed for the new Worcester Library and History Centre. The community excavation gave the opportunity to raise awareness of, and get engagement with, not just the dig, but also with the new building. Whilst the site is based in Worcester City the marketing strategy was mindful of raising awareness with the wider population of Worcestershire too, as the dig, the resultant building and the services to be contained within it, are countywide resources.

The Marketing Plan was intended to sit alongside plans for the new University campus and for public art on the site, including a photographic commission, a web cam and hoardings commissions. The greatest opportunity for marketing was seen to be the visibility of the site, which created word-of-mouth marketing opportunities.

**Target audiences**

- Passers-by to the site – walkers, drivers, train and bus passengers.
- Worcester population.
- Wider population of Worcestershire and the West Midlands region.
- People with an interest in archaeology and local history.
- Tourists and visitors to Worcester.
- Local press.
- County councillors.
- WCC staff (link to work shadowing and dig ‘champions’ within Heritage Services).
- Local community and adult learning groups, including Lifestyles and MotoV8.
- Schools and colleges.
- Interest groups, including archaeology societies.
Selling points

- Uncovering history on our doorstep – objects, stories.
- Getting down and dirty with the dig – engagement, involvement.
- Being a part of the process of creating a new world-class facility for the City.
- A tourist attraction – an addition to the existing Worcester tourism offer.
- Site open to the public 7 days a week, with a guide on site at the weekends from 10am – 4pm and weekly tours by archaeology staff.

The marketing strategy included provision for a ‘visitor experience’ on site to ensure the same standard of experience was offered to all who visited the site and to ensure positive word-of-mouth marketing.

To enhance the tours of the excavation with an on-site exhibition focussed on the history of the site which was refreshed frequently with displays of retrieved artefacts and with textual and graphic summaries of the latest archaeological discoveries. The exhibition also showed the full archaeological process including some of the more unusual tools of the trade.

It was assumed that Visitors to the dig would also want to know about the new Library & History Centre, so staff were equipped to talk about this with some level of knowledge about the services going in the new building and how it is being funded.

Marketing campaign

The main focus for the ten week community period was the Open day on 20th September which was advertised with the draw of:

- Balloons for children to take away with them to carry the ‘message’ into Worcester City and into homes.

- Promotional leaflet for all visitors to take away from the dig. These were also distributed by local libraries and museums and by the tourist information centre. The leaflet displayed generic information about the dig and exhibition and advertised the details of the Open Day itself.
Uncover Worcester at
The Butts Dig

4th August - 12th October - 10am-4pm, 7 days a week

See a real archaeological dig in progress and be among the first to know about the latest finds.

Find out what happens to artefacts once they’ve been unearthed in the finds processing room.

Get to the bottom of the matter with our fascinating exhibition on the Roman and Victorian history of the site.

Take a guided tour of the site with an archaeological expert (weekends only).

Find out more online:
www.worcestershire.gov.uk/archaeology

Discover what lies beneath the site of the groundbreaking Worcester Library and History Centre.

Head down to The Butts

- Advertisements in Worcester papers and in ‘What’s On’

- On WOW website. ‘Focus on’ element of WCC website.
Generic awareness:

- A strap-line “The Butts Dig” was used on all materials relating to the public programme.

- Banners on site, visible also from the train.

- Everyone involved in the dig received a certificate to show they have been involved, again to encourage word-of-mouth marketing (and specific information promoting the Open Day).

- Member involvement – to offer opportunities for County Councillors to be involved in the dig through inclusion in the Heritage Services e-bulletin.

- WCC staff through staff e-newsletter, on SID.

- A specific group of people (The Butts Champions) were involved in the dig in order to promote it around Worcester.

*Butts Champions: Suz Winspear, Teresa Jones and Felicity Knox with Community Project Leader, Justin Hughes*
Links to Heritage Services

The three Butts Dig champions were selected from the City Archives, the City Museum and the County Museum, and all County Library Staff were invited to visit the site for formal tours of the excavation and the exhibition. Staff from the City Museum were also involved with finds processing and classification.

Press and media

A comprehensive media strategy supported the marketing campaign.

The Berrows Journal, Worcester News, The Standard and BBC Radio Hereford and Worcester were actively involved in reporting throughout the ten weeks.

Evaluation

Summary issued by Marketing and Development Department of Worcestershire County Council.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of attendance</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekday casual visitor</td>
<td>30* per day</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weekend casual visitor</td>
<td>50-60* per day</td>
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<td><strong>Total casual visitors</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tour attendees</td>
<td>100 (10 per week)</td>
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<tr>
<td>City council tour attendees</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School party visitors</td>
<td>600 (20 parties)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organised party visitors</td>
<td>200 (two parties per week)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Open Day visitors</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total visitors</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*these numbers are approximate, and numbers tailed off in the final month - partly due to return to school and cooler weather.

County Council

Councillor Philip Gretton, Cabinet Member for Adult and Community Services, visited the site on a number of occasions for photo opportunities.
A number of other members made casual, informal visits to the site.

**District councils**

Councillor David Tibbutt, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Urban Renaissance, and Councillor Patricia Agar, made an official visit to the site with City Council Archaeology Officer James Dinn.

**Media coverage**
Newspaper coverage

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Column centimetres</th>
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<td>Worcester News</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berrow's Journal</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worcester Standard</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express and star</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1909</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Equivalent advertising value</strong>*</td>
<td><strong>£13,363</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*total column centimetres multiplied by 7.

Radio coverage

Justin Hughes was interviewed for a weekly live slot, Tuesdays at 1.50pm on BBC Hereford and Worcester, 5 times. Each broadcast lasted around 5 minutes.

Total equivalent advertising value for this coverage= **£12,500*** plus VAT

*based on a quote from Wyvern FM of £250 plus VAT for a 30-second ad.

Anecdotal evidence

A few volunteers said they joined after hearing the live BBC Hereford and Worcester radio broadcast.

A number of people (perhaps up to 10) did come to the site to see the physical changes from when they either worked or (in one case) had relatives who lived in one of the almshouses. Justin Hughes suggested that there might be an opportunity to create a fuller oral history in future projects of this kind.

A visitors’ book in the exhibition collected people’s comments on the dig. This was full of praise for the archaeology staff and the visitor experience, particularly the Open Day. It also provided the project leader with a continuous public commentary on the archaeological experience.
These included the following samples of remarks:

- “This was where my mother, father, sister and me lived upstairs in the flat. My father (Alf Wright) was the storekeeper for the council depot. We were here from 1947 till 1965. What a surprise to see what was beneath our feet.”

- “My dad…born here. I worked here 30yrs…really interesting…I will be back” (Eric Butt)

- “It was infuseyastic..........”. (sic)

- “Brilliant. We should continue to explore our history. It has lots to offer us for future understanding. Keep it up”.

- “Fascinating site. Excellent that members of the public encouraged to look around and be given a guided tour”.

- “Fascinating insight into how archaeology works and a very informed guide to explain to us”.

- “Well done to everyone working on site…good to find out about where we live”.

- “Good to see public money spent on something worthwhile”.

- “Best place I’ve ever been”.

- “I wish I could help dig”.

![Image of archaeological site with people working on the site.](image-url)
3. **Preparation**

Prior to the archaeological works, and based on previous investigations within the immediate vicinity, a number of research areas were identified for exploration (and are contained within Worcester City Council’s Urban Strategy, Worcester City Council 2007):

1. Stream valleys and gullies on the east bank of the Severn – their identification, character and significance.

2. The Roman road network.

3. The Roman iron industry.

4. Other Roman industries.

5. The environment of Roman Worcester.

6. Sampling and analysis of re-worked Roman to post-medieval soils.

7. The medieval defences.

8. Post-medieval defences, including those of the Civil War.

9. Landscape of the 1651 battle.

10. The development of post-medieval industry in Worcester.

11. Recording of all standing buildings, including the Joseph Wood Building an associated sawmill and workshops.
In short, the combined community and professional teams have been addressing questions about the ways in which humans have made their impact on the areas above, now occupied by Worcester. Archaeological answers have been sought for the following:

- The influence of the river on early settlement,
- Roman occupation,
• social organisation and material culture,
• re-worked soils and post Roman Worcester,
• changing uses of buildings in the study area, and
• history of The Butts.
4. **Public programme**

1 Volunteers were recruited from the general public, the Service mailing list, universities (targeting undergraduates studying archaeology courses and requiring field work experience). Groups who use/potentially use City and County Adult and Community Services were also targeted. A number of volunteers who joined the programme have been involved with community projects also recently run by the Service – for example, with the Worcester Commandery Project in 2005/6 and at Stourport Basins in 2005.

2 Specific activities for visiting groups and volunteers not engaging with excavation included finds processing, environmental sampling and sieving. Volunteers were also given the opportunity to conduct site tours. In liaison with the Worcester Archive Source Project (WASP) a documentary research project has been offered to a number of the community team who participated on site and some of the early results of this were presented at a Dayschool for The Butts in April 2009.
3 School/college visits: specific activities used are summarised below will be identified from above, after consultation with those schools and colleges who book half day visits.

4 Site tours for pre-booked visitor groups, informal daily tours and one weekly formal tour.

5 Excavation Open Day. A major public event to present results of the excavation, and engage the public in the investigations at the Butts, took place on 20th September and included:

- tours of the excavation led by Service staff and volunteers,

- handling sessions and displays of artefacts from excavation with interpretation by archaeologists,

- mock excavation area,

- activities for people to take part in, including creating artworks based on objects seen or reconstructions of the archaeological site,

- re-enactment displays with Roman, medieval and Victorian themes.
5. **Schools education programme**

The archaeological team and voluntary staff provided a schools’ programme designed to link with identified, relevant areas of the primary and secondary curricula. The drawing up of a basic education pack is proposed in order to give pupils and students relevant follow up work in the classroom.

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**Schools programme during archaeological excavations**

**Aims**

- To enable pupils to study the history of The Butts in the context of Roman and medieval Worcester (Key Stage 2 – the Romans and the Victorians, and Key Stage 3 – the growth of towns).

- To provide pupils with the opportunity to be actively involved with on-site activities.

- To enable pupils to prepare and produce their own project work, and to be assessed by their teachers as part of the curriculum.
Programme outline

- During the excavations pupils participated in selected archaeological processes, to learn basic archaeological skills, and to demonstrate related skills in their study of their school history syllabus.

The specific activity took the form of a site tour to give pupils an introduction to the archaeology and history of the area. This was followed by an investigative task where groups of pupils undertook six tasks: excavation, finds washing and identification, classification of artefacts, animal bones and environmental residues.

**General pupil targets**

- In their study of history, high school pupils are expected to acquire ‘knowledge, skills and understanding’ in six areas:

  1. chronological understanding,
  2. understanding of events, people and changes in the past,
  3. historical interpretation,
  4. historical enquiry,
  5. organisation and communication, and
  6. breadth of study, e.g. the way of life of people in the past who lived in the area.

**Specific pupil targets of the schools programme**

To produce topic work relating to the Key Stage 2 history teaching units – Romans and Victorians, which includes the study of political, religious and social changes affecting people in the local area.

- To produce topic work relating to the key stage geography teaching units – ‘Rivers and Settlements’ which includes themes such as the physical evidence for choice of settlement and links to later modules (cf history) which include the study of medieval boroughs, town planning and urbanisation.
• To demonstrate an understanding of ‘key elements’ of the geography and history curriculum; namely: how to find out about (and communicate to others) aspects of the past from ‘a range of sources of information, including artefacts, pictures and photographs...written sources, buildings and sites’.

• To demonstrate and communicate knowledge of how the physical environment changes through time.

Two important aims of primary and secondary school education are to encourage pupils to learn independently, and to form their own studied interpretations of people and environments of the past, in order to come to value their place in the present. The schools programme is intended to give a unique opportunity to pupils, in their quest to appreciate our rich local heritage and link it directly with their studies.

For the specific activities the school groups were introduced to the excavations and then split into two groups so that all pupils were able to excavate in mock pits and to follow the process of archaeology through to an understanding of the discoveries being made. The pits had structures and artefacts within, so that children could learn basic excavation techniques, an understanding of stratigraphy and begin to speculate about what they were exposing.
For the in-door activity pupils were told that they were to excavate and record a site with an ancient house. In order to find out about the people who may have lived in this ancient house the children had to excavate and record the artefacts and environmental samples which archaeologists’ retrieve. The in-door activity room was therefore prepared with:

1) A soil/sandpit with pottery and other objects, but chiefly pottery sherds: Severn Valley ware, Grey ware, Black Burnished Ware and Samian. Bowls and brushes were placed next to the pit for washing artefacts so that the pottery could be identified, dated, measured and weighed. Rim fragments were placed on a chart in order to establish the form and function of the original vessel.

2) Trays with animal bones from sheep, pig, cattle and dog with illustrations of the skeletal characteristics of each and labels for pupils to place against the appropriate animal. Individual bones were then selected for recording by identification of the specific anatomical character, by measuring, weighing and drawing. Pupils also looked for signs of disease and butchery.
3) A smaller box with environmental samples for sieving.
   Pupils placed residues under a microscope in order to identify grape, fig
   and blackberry seeds and charred wheat remains, using tweezers to place
   into individual containers and write out a label and put it on the pots.

Recording forms were used to record all this information and the following
questions were posed to establish what the site was used for:

1) What sort of pottery did they have?
2) What was the pottery used for?
3) Where was the pottery made?
4) What date was the pottery?
5) When might the people have lived in this house?
6) What sort of foods did they eat and what sort of wheat did they grow?
7) What sort of animals did they farm?
8) Did they have any pets?
9) How did they hold their clothes together?
10) Were these people clean and tidy – what is the evidence for your answer?

The physical evidence was supplemented by the following worksheets:

**ACTIVITY INSTRUCTION SHEET 1**

**Pottery sorting and recording**

1) Look at the five charts showing different pottery types and the tray of mixed
   pottery. Sort out the pottery by placing under correct label.

2) Choose an interesting piece of pottery with a rim ‘top edge’.

3) Fill in Pottery Recording Form with the details about your chosen piece of
   pottery. Start with type of pottery.

4) Then put your pottery rim onto the weighing scales and see how heavy it
   weighs in grams.
5) Then use the ‘Rim Chart’ to work out the diameter of the rim by placing it upside down on the chart and getting the curve to match up with the lines on the chart. Write the result on your pottery form.

6) If you have any time left, draw what you think your pot might have looked like and/or draw the sideways on edge called the ‘profile of your rim.

**ACTIVITY INSTRUCTION SHEET 2**

**Environmental - bones, seeds and pips**

**Animal bones**

1) Look at the trays of animal bones from four different animals. Using the information decide which tray contains which animal bones. Place the right label in tray.

2) Choose an interesting bone and record details on the Bone Form. Measure how long it is and find out how heavy it is on the weighing scales. Then if there is time, draw your bone on the back of form.

**Seeds and Pips**

1) Look at the photos of magnified seeds. Then look through the microscope at the remains from an old type of toilet pit – called a cess pit. See if you spot the different types of seeds.

2) Then using the tweezers, carefully pick up the blackberry pips and put them into glass dishes (as below).
Feedback from schools

A sample of the comments from visiting teachers:

- Thank you for the excellent morning we spent at The Butts. I have only had positive feedback from students directly and positive comments from other staff.

- Thank you very much for our visit to the Community Dig today. All the pupils really enjoyed it and most came back with a much better understanding of the archaeological process. There was a good range of activities and just the right amount of time to undertake them.

- A huge thank you to all involved in our day today. It was superb. The children loved it and were really excited by everything they saw. They said the best bit was having a go rather than just having to watch.
6. **Volunteer programme**

In the summers of 2005 and 2006 the Service ran a successful community excavation for Worcester City Council as part of a Heritage Lottery programme at the Commandery Museum. Recruitment of volunteers and school activities were integral to this programme and provided a good launching pad for the Butts Dig.

Roughly a quarter of the 90 volunteers who registered for the Butts had gained experience at the Commandery excavations and the remainder comprised a similar array of local 'recruits', students and people working part or full time, and retired people. As a training programme was deemed desirable volunteers and the Service signed up to a formal agreement stating the following commitments:

**From the Service:**

- An induction to the Service.
- An outline of roles and tasks.
- Training and support in basic on-site excavation, recording and post-excavation techniques.
- Opportunities to help you to develop skills and experience.
- Specific training and support on health and safety matters.
The opportunity to receive and give feedback.

**From the volunteer:**

- Working with soils - trowelling, cleaning, and excavating features.
- Recording archaeological deposits - written descriptions, photographs, scale drawings, plotting three-dimensional coordinates of features and artefacts.
- Caring for the excavated artefacts – washing, marking, bagging.
- Explaining evidence to visitors and site tours.

**Feedback from volunteers**

"I loved it all. The thrill of finding and handling Roman pots. I have a much better understanding now of all the processes used in recording. The archaeologists gave such clear explanations and were very patient. The team spirit was really good....don't change anything - it was really perfect. I would like to do more and look forward to the next time".

"I would like to thank you now for yet another fantastic opportunity to experience what it is like to be involved on a 'dig'. I had a great time and learnt still more about
the processes involved and met some really nice people along the way. Thanks also for your kindness and patience during what was surely a very busy and exciting time at The Butts".

7. Public involvement

Groups who actively took part in, or visited the dig included: Primary, Secondary and Special Schools and Local Children’s Clubs, Lifestyles, Worcester Task Force, MotoV8, University of Worcester undergraduate archaeology students, the Young Archaeologists Club, the University of the Third Age, Natural England Staff, Worcester Archaeology Society and many more casual visitors who were given informal and formal tours of the excavations and exhibition rooms.

For the first 6 weeks of the dig there was an average of 30 casual visitors per weekday and 50/60 on Saturdays and Sundays. Numbers tailed off in the final month - partly due to a return to school and the weather cooling - but over the ten weeks around 2,000 people visited the site. This does not include the formal tours which were conducted for the volunteers each Friday and were joined by an average of 10 per week over a period of 15 weeks.

From August to October there was an average of two organised party visits per week from various sources, from library staff to undergraduate students, from special needs groups to historical and archaeological societies – with a total estimate of around 200 people.

20 schools and up to 30 parties of pupils joined formal activity programmes, to have a hands-on introduction to archaeological processes (excavation, artefacts and environmental) including interpretation. Some schools booked double sessions and
pupil ages varied from 5 to 14 years. The number of pupils including a weekend 'club' numbered around 600.

**TOTAL ESTIMATED NUMBERS OF VISITORS = AROUND 3,000**

900 people came to the open day on 20th September.

A small number of volunteers joined the dig after hearing the live BBC radio broadcasts. A number of people also came to the site to see the physical changes from when they either worked or (in one case) had relatives who lived in one of the almshouses. A fuller oral history has been suggested for future projects of this kind.

![Surviving remains of the Almshouses](image-url)
Open day - 20 September 2008

1. Site tours
2. Historical re-enactors
3. Exhibition
4. Meet an archaeological artist
5. Worcester Archive Source Project
6. Worcester City HER
7. Worcestershire HE
8. Hands-on washing excavated pottery
9. Drawing Roman pottery
10. Story Time
11. Hands-on building recording
12. Hands-on mock excavation
13. Hands-on medieval archery
14 Museum on the Move (van)
9. **Summary of excavation results**

The site which the new Library and History Centre is to occupy to the north of The Butts was most recently used as a vehicle depot and offices for Worcester City Council, within the former complex of buildings which Joseph Wood Builders Ltd used from the 1840s, as a timber yard to serve his family business. One passer-by informed the team at the dig that he had worked on the site for a total of 34 years and that the workshops associated with the Joseph Wood Building were still in use while he was employed there. A row of nine almshouses was also rediscovered to the north of the workshops and another visitor recalled that she had relatives who once lived here. These brick-built residences and working plots were demolished in the 1960s and 1970s.

Prior to modern industrial use, the site formed part of the Netherton Estate and its eastern fringe is bounded by Netherton Lane to this day. There seems only to have been a low level agricultural character during the Georgian years of the 18th century and the site certainly lies outside the main urban area of the earlier medieval town which was enclosed in the 12th century by a substantial defensive ditch and wall.

Lying parallel to, and north of, the city wall a ditch was exposed by the volunteer team very early on in the community dig. Within this feature a Charles II coin of 1672 was unearthed and although the structure was probably formed a property boundary it may also have had a defensive function during the Civil War years.

Although commerce and industry is known to have straddled along the northern route out of the medieval city along Foregate Street and The Butts was used as a target range for archers, archaeologists and volunteers determined that there is little sign of occupation in the post-Roman period. However, the site was a hive of activity from the late 1st century AD to the mid 4th century with at least four phases of occupation represented by large drainage and boundary ditches, by cobbled roads and yards and by at least three buildings; the first range of complete Roman buildings seen in Worcester and which were probably the houses of urban craftsmen.

It was thought that, because of the sheer size of one of the building footprints, there had been a two-storey, stone-built and aisled house here, but subsequent excavation across some of the foundations has indicated that the building was not completed before the area was abandoned in the later Roman period.
However, people were living and working here (and to the north of the railway viaduct) for over 200 years during the days of the Roman Empire, constructing roads, smelting iron, trading locally and further afield. This is clear from the range and abundance of pottery recovered during the investigations.

Much of the west side of the excavated areas contained concentrated spreads of burnt material around at least nine oven structures and within clay floors, internal to the living space.

The archaeological deposits are complex and there are mysterious features lying outside the buildings in the form of three very large pits. One of these contains the remains of a stone-lined well, another contained large amounts of discarded slag (smelting waste, often reused for metalling road surfaces) and the third is over four
metres deep with waterlogged, organic remains below the water table. The function of this last pit is at present obscure.

What has become clear during the community dig is that Roman activity was intense. The site has produced well preserved coins, brooches and bracelets and huge numbers of sherds of pottery, including large numbers of almost complete vessels, such as this beehive.

The final, technical report, is eagerly awaited by the volunteers, by the archaeologists, and by local people who came to answer the call:

**The Butts Dig: What Will You Find?**

10. **Acknowledgements**

The following organisations and individuals have helped the community programme in no short measure:

The Joint Project Team of Worcestershire County Council, Worcester City Council and the University of Worcester, Iain Paul, James Dinn, Ian Pithouse and Helen Large (marketing), Libraries and Museum’s staff, and The Butts Champions (Suz Winspear,
Teresa Jones and Felicity Knox. All the schools who came to get a serious taste of archaeology, all visitor groups and casual visitors. A special thanks is due to Mark Harding for assistance beyond the call of duty. And finally, a huge thank you to all the volunteers who not only took part but were an asset to the community project.

11. **Personnel**

Angus Crawford, Darren Miller, Simon Sworn, Tegan Cole, Tim Cornah, Alessandra Parsons, Des O'Donoghue, Marge Feryok, Deborah Overton, Ruth Humphries, Hal Dalwood, Simon Woodiwiss, Tom Vaughan, Steve Woodhouse, Richard Shakles, Dennis Williams, Chris Gibbs, Emma Hancox, Shona Robson-Glyde, Claire Smith and Justin Hughes.