

## **The Search for Alfred the Great**

### **Brief**

The University of Winchester in partnership with Hyde900 led an archaeological excavation to find the final resting place of Alfred the Great. The project was exclusively filmed by BBC2.

The search began at the 'Unmarked Grave' at Saint Bartholomew's Church in Hyde, Winchester, where the remains of King Alfred were widely believed to reside. Radiocarbon dating concluded that the bones were later than Alfred's reign. The team continued their investigations and unexpectedly found a fragment of pelvic bone thought to belong to King Alfred or his son Edward the Elder among remains from a 1990s community excavation of Hyde Abbey.

### **Objectives**

- Gain strong national, local/regional and specialist news coverage to raise awareness and help drive a large national audience to watch the BBC2 documentary
- Spark interest on social media to raise awareness and help drive a large national audience to watch the programme
- Engage the Hyde community and the city council in the discovery to help support further archaeological investigations at the site of Hyde Abbey
- Raise awareness of the University of Winchester as a leading institution for the study of archaeology

### **Strategy and tactics**

The Press Office needed to control the exposure and timing of the story to maximise news coverage and capture the public's imagination ahead of the documentary TX.

#### City council:

Project representatives met the city council ahead of the announcement.

#### Media training:

Project academics and Hyde900 spokespeople were trained. One expert was trained in the car from Gatwick Airport to the press conference.

#### Press invitation:

This gave enough information to entice the media to attend the press conference, while not revealing crucial findings.

#### Press conference:

Held under embargo in Hyde Parish Hall, chosen because it is located alongside the Unmarked Grave and Hyde Abbey, and brought the story into the heart of the Hyde community. The Hyde Tavern opened to offer free refreshments.

University researchers and members of Hyde900 presented with graphics of evidence and clips from the BBC documentary.

The press conference was filmed and added to the University website.

Press pack and news release:

Provided to all at the press conference, with supporting material and images available to download from the website. The news release was also emailed to all contacts at the close of the press conference.

Website/online press pack:

Dedicated section on the University's website for journalists, the Hyde community and the wider public. Content included: the news release, research evidence, biographies, images and documentary clips.

Social channels:

The University's Twitter and Facebook channels were used and a video of the press conference was added to YouTube. University experts also engaged in blogs and forums.

Interviews:

The Press Office facilitated media interviews with key spokespeople.

Pop-up exhibition:

Opened at St Bartholomew's Church to make the findings of the project available to the Hyde community and wider public.

Live screening:

The BBC documentary was screened live at the University for the Hyde community and invited guests. It was followed by a Q&A with BBC producers, researchers and members of Hyde900.

### **Implementation**

The Press Office commissioned Briscoe French Communications to support its activities. The press invitation went to media contacts on 15 January inviting them to the press conference on 17 January. At the close of the press conference the news release was sent to all media contacts and given to those in attendance. On 21 January BBC2 broadcast an hour-long documentary, *The Search for Alfred the Great*, presented by Neil Oliver. The pop-up exhibition opened on 22 January and was news released.

### **Outcomes and outputs**

- 19 media outlets including BBC News, ITN, PA News, Reuters, The Times, The Guardian and The Daily Telegraph attended the press conference
- 216 articles mentioning the University across international, national (all excluding the FT and Express), regional/local, online and specialist press were published
  - 99% was positive and 1% balanced/neutral
  - OTS of nearly 39 million
- Covered nationally by ITN, 5 News and Channel 4 news, and internationally by CNN, plus all local/regional broadcast media including BBC South Today, Meridian and Wave105
- 60 media enquiries
- 463 unique visits to the Alfred section on the University website
- 124 tweets mentioning Alfred and @\_UoW and 99,435 Twitter followers reached
- 2,979 reach on Facebook for the Search for Alfred and 1,879 reach for the exhibition
- 114 blogs published
- Press conference viewed 850 times on YouTube
- 2.17 million watched the BBC documentary
- Print and online coverage of exhibition OTS: 259,339

- 143 attended the live screening (RSVP and capacity = 150)
- Shortlisted for Best PR/Advocacy Campaign in the Heist Awards 2014 (ceremony 10 July)
- HRH The Duke of Gloucester visited the University on 23 June to learn more about the project
- The city council became a project partner
- The BBC documentary team filmed the press conference and are still in touch about the project – potential for a follow-up programme
- Discussions about further investigations are underway with Hyde residents and community groups
- One Hyde community group was sceptical about the project, however it is now engaged and involved in discussions

*“The University communications team was excellent. They expertly managed the press conference and did a great job of rounding up what was a ‘full house’ of national and local media securing some great coverage.”* Winchester City Council

*“Hyde900 was delighted by the level of interest generated in the story and the quality of the media coverage which followed. It has given us a strong platform from which further projects can be built in relation to the story of Hyde Abbey and its links with King Alfred the Great.”*  
Hyde900

#### **Budget and cost effectiveness**

The budget was £9,500. Expenditure was £8,014 and included costs such as Briscoe French Communications, press conference AV, film/photography and printing. The campaign reached an international audience of more than 42 million people – an outstanding ROI. The story captured the public’s imagination and set the course for further projects to uncover more about the history of Hyde and King Alfred.