

Sussex Archaeological Field Unit to Archaeology South-East:

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Director, Archaeology South-East

celebrating 50 years



The Sussex Archaeological Field Unit (SAFU) was conceived in 1973 by the Institute of Archaeology (IoA) – then part of the University of London – and the Department of Environment (DoE). This was part of the DoE's wider reorganisation of 'rescue archaeology' on a regional basis, which will be familiar to many archaeologists as the starting point for most county- and city-based field units in the late 1960s and into the 1970s.

With a remit for rescue excavation and training, the SAFU was the first full-time unit working in Sussex, guided by an academic executive with representatives from both the IoA and DoE, as well as locally based county archaeologists and members of a local advisory panel that included the Sussex Archaeological Society and other local groups and societies. SAFU formally launched on 1 April 1974.

*Some of our ASE Essex field team at one of several new Iron Age settlements revealed in recent large-scale excavations on the outskirts of Chelmsford, Essex.
Credit: ASE*





The ASE team who participated in the Roman Sussex session at RAC 24: Tom Munnery, Andy Margetts, Giles Dawkes, Anna Doherty, Louise Rayner and Elsa Neveu. Credit: ASE



An anniversary social media post on golden finds #ASEat50. Credit: ASE

Louise Rayner

Louise has been Director at ASE since March 2023, and before that was Head of Post-Excavation & Specialist Services for 18 years. She has over 30 years' experience in development-led and university-based archaeology, developing a career in pottery research, post-ex management and then senior leadership. CIFA Finds SIG Chair (2018–21), she is particularly interested in capacity building and training and coaching, as well as initiatives looking to improve standards across the sector.



Like many of our peers, since 1974 our organisation has evolved and grown, particularly in response to changes to the funding basis with the introduction of PPG16 and competitive tendering. SAFU became the IoA Field Archaeology Unit (FAU) in 1984; in December 1991, South Eastern Archaeological Services was launched as a division of FAU in response to the developing nature of commercial archaeology, and in 1996/7 rebranded as Archaeology South-East (ASE). In 2014, we incorporated the Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit into ASE, established as our Essex office now based just outside Witham, and formalised our team operating in London. Importantly, through all these changes we remain part of the UCL Institute of Archaeology, which remains a strong influence on the ethos and culture at ASE.

Through 2024, we have been marking our 50th anniversary in various ways: a co-hosted session at the Roman Archaeology Conference, and a series of blogs, social media and an article exploring the unit's origins, history and name changes, ASE in the media, golden finds and more.

In April 2025 we are closing our anniversary year with an all-day event near Brighton – a celebration of ASE (and its predecessors) and showcase of our work, with insights into current research from both ASE staff and special guest external speakers. We'll also have an eye to the future and what the next 50 years might bring.

Perhaps most importantly, the event is an opportunity to catch up and connect with colleagues and friends, past and present, from across the archaeological community. This event is open to all, so do join us.

The ASE 50th conference is on 5 April 2025. Details and booking can be found at: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology-south-east/ase-50>