

Outreach in the time of COVID-19:

Archaeology South-East digs deeper

Emily Johnson, Archaeology South-East

Public engagement and outreach have always been high priorities at Archaeology South-East, a commercial archaeology and heritage division based at the UCL Institute of Archaeology. Our archaeologists are regularly engaged in school visits, site open days and large community projects, and our social media channels are full of exciting finds and research. You may have also seen us in the press this year, as we had some fascinating discoveries (like the Red Lion playhouse in London) and research (like the Boxgrove horse butchery site) to share with the world.



ASE's Michael Shapland during the investigations into the Brighton Dome complex. Credit: Archaeology South-East

That being said, we're always on the lookout for innovative ways to disseminate our research, and earlier this year, tech-savvy finds specialist Steve Patton casually floated the idea of an ASE podcast. After some intensive discussion, we decided our podcast would offer an insight into development-led archaeology, demystifying the process, the people, the discoveries and the stories. Our guests would be ASE colleagues from all areas of the archaeological and heritage sector. Ideally, content would be relevant and accessible to a wide range of audiences, from archaeological professionals to the interested public. And – hopefully – it would be a lot of fun!

We recorded the first episode the very next day. Steve brought in some audio equipment, I offered to host, and we cajoled Teresa Vieira, lead archaeologist on the Walberton 'Warrior' excavation, into being our first guest. We all crammed into our photography room (in the days before social distancing) and within 24

hours of its conception, we had a recorded podcast episode!

Then, the COVID-19 lockdown hit. The podcast was put to one side while we adjusted to the 'new normal' of life during a pandemic. It wasn't until the summer when we saw the opportunity to rekindle the project, alongside our imminent announcement of the discovery of the Red Lion, the earliest purpose-built Elizabethan playhouse. We predicted a high level of public and academic interest and realised a podcast episode would be the ideal way to address questions people might have, and in far more detail than the press release allowed.

We rapidly assembled a podcast team of talented colleagues with design, branding, marketing and public engagement expertise. They came up with a name, logo and release strategy, and the Archaeology South-East Digs Deeper podcast was born! I recorded a new episode via videoconferencing with Stephen

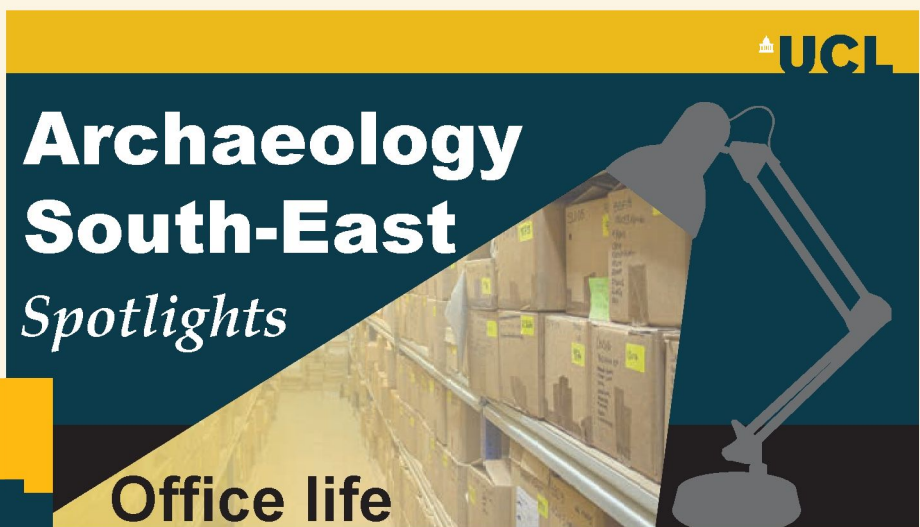
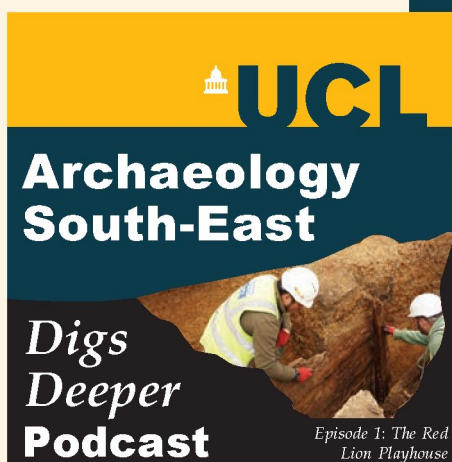
White, lead archaeologist on the Whitechapel excavations where the purported Red Lion was found. I light-heartedly grilled Stephen over the evidence for the playhouse – the timber structure, the dating evidence, the historical maps, and what we think it might have looked like – all information that was included in the press release but that couldn't be explored in such detail.

The first episode got a great reception, with over 200 listens, and that catalysed us to record and release more episodes. Next, I spoke to Simon Stevens about his outreach and research projects based in the South East, including experimental archaeological iron smelting with the Wealden Iron Research Group. Historic buildings archaeologist Michael Shapland was next in the hot seat, talking about how one captures the 'spirit' of soon-to-be-demolished historic buildings during objective recording, and his work on the Brighton Dome complex. And the first recorded episode with Teresa finally saw



Archaeologists excavating the Walberton 'Warrior' grave. Credit: Archaeology South-East

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the light of day, detailing what we know (and what we're hoping to find out) about the latest 'warrior' burial to be found in West Sussex.

It's not just been archaeological practice on the schedule – we've been discussing some really important issues affecting our sector with Kayt Hawkins of the BAJR RESPECT campaign. We talked about what steps are being taken to tackle sexual harassment in the archaeological workplace and what still

needs to be addressed. These are the sorts of conversations you can expect alongside our more archaeological episodes as we try to unpack all aspects of commercial archaeology.

The ASE Digs Deeper podcast has really galvanised our digital outreach and led to further new projects, like our ASE Spotlights video series on our YouTube channel, which presents short snapshots of the archaeological process. We recently posted a virtual tour of our Sussex office. And the

podcast is certainly not going anywhere! We have lots more episodes planned that I can't wait to record. So look out for our ASE Digs Deeper podcasts, airing roughly monthly for your (hopefully) listening pleasure!

ASE Digs Deeper is available to listen from hosting apps like iTunes, Stitcher and Spotify, or you can find episodes on our Soundcloud (www.soundcloud.com/uclarchaeologysouth-east)

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Emily Johnson

Emily is a zooarchaeologist and social media coordinator at Archaeology South-East. When not writing animal bone reports she is busy creating a wide variety of digital content for our online audiences – and that includes hosting ASE's new podcast!