

Behind the scenes with Ralph Fiennes' dialect coach on *The Dig*

Two years ago, Netflix's *The Dig* took the world by storm. Released on January 15, 2021, it retold the remarkable story of how one Suffolk man and his team of archaeologists uncovered perhaps the most important discovery in helping us understand more about the Anglo-Saxon era.

Historian Charlie Haylock played his own part in the film, having been headhunted by Netflix producers to be Ralph Fiennes' dialect coach, ensuring the award-winning actor nailed the local accent.

Through Charlie's tried and tested methods (involving mirrors), he was able to get Fiennes sounding like a true Suffolk gent', through and through.

And in the years since, Charlie has gone on tour, explaining how he taught Fiennes, and what life was like on set. His talks have been so successful (often selling out), that he is about to deliver his 100th – with another 50 in the pipeline.

"Suffolk people are very proud that their accent was correctly portrayed on the big screen for the first time – and people want to know how and why that came about," he explains.

"For decades and decades, they were sick to the back teeth of hearing Suffolk people portrayed as 'West of Swindon with a touch of Long John Silver', as Martin Newell puts it."

The *Dig* was released when we were still in lockdown, but when restrictions were lifted, Charlie was able to head out and meet people across the region, regaling them with tales of his time on set and some hilarious behind-the-

Historian Charlie Haylock is about to give his 100th talk about his time working with the cast and crew of the Hollywood film. He speaks with **Danielle Lett...**

scenes stories.

"We had a long lockdown, but now people are able to go back out and enjoy themselves. Wherever I go, it's always a full house, with extra chairs being put out. It's exciting that people want to hear me, but it keeps me humble – I have to keep that balance."

Just some of the organisations that book Charlie include WIs, local history groups and societies, U3As, sports clubs, gardening clubs, private clubs, and church and village hall fundraisers.

"And I don't just do talks in Suffolk, I also go into north Essex, south Norfolk, east Cambridgeshire, and even northeast Hertfordshire," he adds.

The audience reaction is always positive, he says.

"I couldn't ask for better audiences. They're with me all the way, even before I've started. It makes for a fantastic evening for both me and the audience – it's fantastic."

A highlight for Charlie is the questions they come up with at the end.

"One question that always comes up is 'what was Ralph Fiennes like to work with?' I can honestly say that he is very hardworking and diligent in what he does, and I'm the same. We hit it off immediately. I knew what he wanted, and he knew what I wanted – which was a perfect Suffolk accent."

The two worked together so well on set that they have now become friends, and even meet socially.

"Another question that frequently comes up is 'why wasn't filming done at Sutton Hoo?' Well, like it says in the film, after the excavation, Basil filled everything back up, and put loads of bracken down to preserve what he found, so after the war it could be uncovered for everyone to see.

"But when the war started, it was turned into a tank training ground and they carved the place up, destroying what Basil had found. Also, filming at Sutton Hoo itself would've meant closing down a National Trust site for seven to nine months, which they couldn't afford to happen. A lot of scenes were shot in Suffolk, but we went to south Surrey where they found similar terrain and mounds they could dig into."

One question that never fails to enthrall the audience however is 'what was your most memorable experience on set?'

"That was when Ralph stood up one day and did a Shakespeare soliloquy, 'To Be or Not To Be', in a Suffolk accent. It was absolutely amazing, and the audience at the end were stunned into silence. He had them in the palm of his hands all the way through. When he was finished, he said 'I've directed Hamlet, I've been Hamlet, I've played every other part in it, and I've watched it so many times. But doing it in a Suffolk accent, because the rhythm is different to what we've been taught and the pauses are in a different place, takes Shakespeare to a higher level than I've ever known before.' And everyone all agreed, and said he brought it alive."

Once the Q&A part of the talk is done, Charlie gets to know some of his audience – and a number of the people who turn up are somehow associated with Sutton Hoo.

"On my 50th talk, I met a lady who worked in Basil Brown's garden along with her friend when she was younger. She said: 'I've watched that film so many times, it was like watching Basil. He spoke like Basil, and walked like Basil. After Basil became famous, when the kids in the village were digging in their gardens with their dads and found



something, they ran to Basil's door and asked him if it was anything important, and Mr Brown would always look at it and be interested in it."

"She then said the way he spoke to Robert in the film is how he spoke to the kids in the village. You can't get a better accolade than that."

Charlie has also met the grandson of Mrs Pretty's lawyer who represented her at the tribunal, the woman who took Ralph Fiennes on a pre-film archaeological dig on the Norfolk-Suffolk border, the daughter of the policeman who stood guard outside the small wooden village hall where the treasure was kept overnight after it was discovered, and several people who knew Mrs Pretty.

"I also met a lady from Culford School, near West Stow. Basil took a lot of boys to West Stow to do an archeological dig as they thought it was going to be a Roman villa, but they ended up uncovering another Anglo-Saxon settlement. She said a lot of the boys from that time were so inspired by Basil's enthusiasm, that a lot of them became archaeologists. I've met so many lovely people during these talks, who want to come up and share their stories with me."

Every talk holds a special place

in Charlie's heart – but there's one that particularly stands out.

"The best had to be in Walberswick, when Ralph himself was in the audience. It shows you what sort of bloke he is – he had done a long stint in London every night of the week except Sunday, but was off for three days, so wanted to come in and sit down and enjoy himself. So he rang me up and said 'can you save me a seat, and reserve it under your name by the door, so I can just slip in and sit down, as it's your show.' And that's what he did."

At the end of his talk, Charlie said 'we're going to have a Q&A, and there's going to be two of us', and up Ralph stood. The audience were gobsmacked.

Does Charlie ever get bored on the topic?

"Definitely not. I'm always made to feel welcome wherever I go, and I always get a lovely thank you at the end from a warm and appreciative audience. I always go home chuffed," he says.

Charlie's 100th talk will be taking place at Bury St Edmunds' All Saints Church on Saturday, February 18. Doors open at 3.30pm for a 4pm start, and tickets are £8. To find out more, contact Sheila on 01284 762774 or 07815 504991 or visit the 'See Charlie' page at charliehaylock.com



An audience awaiting Charlie Haylock to take to the stage at Sudbury Rugby Club

Picture: CHARLOTTE BOND, NEWSQUEST



Above: Charlie Haylock and Ralph Fiennes on the set of *The Dig*

Picture: LARRY HORRICKS/NETFLIX

Right: Charlie Haylock giving a talk on *The Dig* at Sudbury Rugby Club

Picture: CHARLOTTE BOND, NEWSQUEST



I need a new home...

Bow, male Staffordshire bull terrier cross, one year and 10 months old

Bubby Bow is a big sweetheart, who has so much love to give to his forever family. He is a super intelligent boy, who loves to learn new things, explore new areas and meet new people.

His favourite thing to do is zoomie around our large field, throwing balls in the air and trying to catch them himself... and then dropping it in front of your feet so you can play too.

During his quiet time, he loves nothing more than being an oversized lap dog, cuddling up close to you on the sofa for some strokes.

He can become frustrated when seeing other dogs on walks, but can be easily managed from a distance and being provided with positive reinforcement training to help him become more comfortable.

He has spent many months of his short life in rescue, through no fault of his own, and he



Bow needs an active but calm home
Picture: RSPCA SUFFOLK CENTRAL

deserves nothing more than a loving home to call his own.

If you have an active but calm home, then Bow could be your dog. If you're interested in Bow or any other animals in our care please email us info@rspca-suffolkcentral.org.uk and we'd be happy to help you.

ask the vet

Nina Downing, PDSA veterinary nurse



My dog Archie is very nervous around other dogs but we live near a field where dogs are always being walked. What can I do to help him?

As Archie is nervous around dogs, taking him to places where he's coming across others frequently can actually reinforce the problem and continue the cycle of fear. Find a quieter place to walk him, where there are fewer dogs around. Using a yellow bandana or lead on your dog alerts other dog walkers that your dog is nervous and needs space. If in speaking distance, ask other dog owners to keep their dogs on the lead and continue past without stopping. Talk to Archie to reassure him during and once they've passed without incident, then offer him a treat so the meeting is associated with something pleasant. To help Archie feel better when meeting other dogs, take a look at our advice here: www.pdsa.org.uk/pet-help-and-advice/looking-after-your-pet/puppies-dogs/dog-aggression

My rabbit, Jonny, has started breathing faster than usual and sneezing a lot. What should I do to help him?

Breathing problems in rabbits can be very serious so it is important you contact your vet as soon as possible. A normal, healthy rabbit should take about 30-60 breaths per minute when calm, they

should have a clean nose, clear eyes without discharge and breathe almost silently with no effort. Breathing issues in rabbits can be caused by many different problems but all need investigating as they can become very serious, very quickly. It's important to get Jonny seen as soon as possible, as he's likely to share his home with other bunnies, you should have them checked too. For more information, please visit: www.pdsa.org.uk/pet-help-and-advice/pet-health-hub/symptoms/breathing-problems/fast-breathing-in-rabbits

My cat, Bobby, has a bad smell coming from his ear along with discharge sometimes, is there anything I can do to help him?

Ear problems are painful, and rarely improve without treatment. They often get worse over time, so it's important to contact your vet so Bobby can be checked over. Your vet will need to examine the ear to find out what's wrong. Ear problems can include yeast or bacterial infections, ear mites, something in the ear that shouldn't be there or even an injury such as a wound or bite. It's important to get it checked out as soon as possible so that Bobby is not in pain and to prevent his general health from getting any worse. For more information please visit: www.pdsa.org.uk/pet-help-and-advice/pet-health-hub/symptoms/ear-problems-in-cats

Nina Downing is a veterinary nurse at the PDSA, answering questions on pet-related concerns

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