

## HERITAGE CIRCLE

### Charlie Haylock, *The Dig*

Charlie Haylock gave a very interesting and entertaining talk at the October meeting of the Heritage Circle about his experience as the Suffolk dialect coach on the *Netflix* film *The Dig* about the discovery of the Sutton Hoo treasure.

The invitation to become the dialect coach came as a complete surprise to Charlie. He received an email from the producer, Redmond Morris, but he initially thought that it was either spam or a scam. Charlie managed to contact Morris who convinced him that the offer was genuine. He was put in touch with the star of the film, Ralph Fiennes. This was the start of a very close working relationship. Charlie's role was to coach the cast so that they would speak with Suffolk accents. The director of the film was determined that the accents should be authentic, not 'West of Swindon with a touch of Long John Silver'!

Charlie was sent the script and his first task was 'Suffolkate' it. He changed some of the language to introduce Suffolk words and expressions, such as 'I runned' not 'I ran.' He had to avoid words which would not be understood by the expected global audience for the film. He then annotated the script by writing the dialogue phonetically and using hieroglyphics to alert the cast to the inflection of the words so that 'farm' would be pronounced 'faam' as there is no 'r' in Suffolk speech. Suffolk people resonate sounds at the front of the mouth. They speak slowly with tiny pauses when telling a story which encourages listeners to concentrate on what is said.

The cast were actors who were drawn from many regions of the British Isles. Charlie had to ensure that they spoke like people from Suffolk rather than 'West Country Pirates.' This was a challenge. He took the cast to a dance studio so that they were able to look at their mouth movements in a mirror so that their accent would be accurate. They even carried a small mirror on to the set for the same purpose when filming. Scenes were often shot 25 or 30 times until Charlie was happy with the quality of the accent of individual actors. This could be very difficult for everyone on the set. Occasionally, tempers frayed.

Charlie was very impressed with the dedication of Ralph Fiennes to become his character, Basil Brown, the archaeologist employed to direct the excavation of the Sutton Hoo site. Before filming began, Ralph Fiennes read all of the books that he could find on Basil Brown, Mrs Pretty who owned the land, and Sutton Hoo. He dressed in tweed clothes like those worn by Basil Brown. He talked to people who knew his character and looked at photographs to understand his mannerisms. He took part in an archaeological dig. Ralph Fiennes cycled huge distances, just like Brown, including from Woodbridge to Brown's home in Rickinghall. This was a journey that Basil Brown did every weekend during the excavation in 1939. Once filming began, Ralph Fiennes spoke in his Suffolk accent all of the time and went to pubs and cafés to listen to people speaking. Charlie called him 'Basil.' Ralph Fiennes thinks that Basil Brown is the most iconic character that he has ever played. There are elements of the film *The Dig* which were fictionalised but Charlie is convinced that the portrayal of Basil Brown was as accurate. This is an interesting observation as at the Heritage Circle meeting on Wednesday 25 January Sarah Doig will give a talk entitled *The Real Basil Brown*.

Charlie illustrated his talk with a number of stories about the filming, many of which were very funny. It was an excellent evening entertaining a large audience.

The next meeting of the Heritage Circle will be on Wednesday 23 November at Rickinghall Village Hall when Jennie Vere will give a talk about *Lopham Linen*. Further information is available at [www.heritagecircle.onesuffolk.net](http://www.heritagecircle.onesuffolk.net).

Gerry Gurhy