

Centre for Audio-Visual Study and Practice in Archaeology (CASPAR)

Don Henson*

CASPAR is the Centre for Audio-Visual Study and Practice in Archaeology. It was set up in February 2010 at the UCL Institute of Archaeology, under the Honorary Directorship of Don Henson, to be a focus for research and debate on the relationship between archaeology and audio-visual media of communication and representation, including radio, television, film, internet, hand-held digital communications and static interpretation media. The Advisory Committee has representatives not only from the Institute of Archaeology but also from the British Museum, Bristol University and the University of California at Berkeley.

The launch event was held as a day-conference on 23 April 2010, with talks from the TV presenter and archaeologist Julian Richards, Dan Pett, Angela Piccini and Andy Gardner. CASPAR had a very visible presence at TAG Bristol in 2010. We sponsored and introduced the keynote evening speaker, Michael Wood, who gave an excellent talk about his recent TV series *The Story of Britain*. Conference delegates were able to take part in a virtual session on *First Life*, and CASPAR also organised an enthusiastically received day-session on audio-visual media. CASPAR's next activity was a series of research seminars (January to March 2011) covering the development of broadcast archaeology on TV, the challenges of producing archaeology on TV, archaeology on the radio, using digital technology to visualise the past, the Google ancient-places project, audience reception of TV archaeol-

ogy, developing digital communities, the Portable Antiquities Scheme website, and archaeology and videogames. Most recently a joint workshop was held with the Archaeology and Communication Research Network (ACRN) on digital strategies of engagement between archaeologists and the public.

CASPAR has a wide-ranging network of interested researchers and practitioners covering many different forms of audio-visual media. A-V technology is developing rapidly. Key areas of development are in social media and augmented reality. Archaeologists now have the means to engage with interested publics in ways that allow a much greater two-way flow of ideas, experiences and information. The corollary of this is that the archaeologists may surrender some of their control over how people engage with the past. How they do this without sacrificing the authority of archaeological practice will be a key challenge that CASPAR is keen to explore. Another key theme to emerge over the last year is the need to undertake more research into the nature of the media audiences for archaeology. They are likely to be more heterogeneous than we suspect, and we need to understand what they are wanting out of their form of engagement with archaeology. A further theme is how to enable genuinely democratic practice in communication that empowers audiences rather than treating them just as consumers of information thrown at them by archaeologists. CASPAR has got off to a good start, with key supporters in Institute staff, such as Tim Schadla-Hall, Andy Gardner and Andy Bevan, and an enthusiastic following among postgraduates, led by Chiara Bonacchi who does much of CASPAR's administration.

¹ UCL Institute of Archaeology,
London WC1H 0PY, United Kingdom
d.henson@ucl.ac.uk