

Portia Sarah Anne Askew (1957–2026)



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It was with great shock and sadness that we heard of Portia's death in January. In the many messages that circulated as people shared their memories of Portia, two things stood out – her incredible kindness and her commitment to her archaeological work. Wherever the site and despite often difficult conditions, she worked tirelessly to get the best results, always looking after her co-workers.

She grew up in Cambridgeshire and, in 1981, joined the Museum of

London's DUA as an environmental archaeologist, until 1983. Ever adventurous, Portia then taught urban archaeological skills in Paris and supervised excavations at South Shields Roman Fort, Tyne and Wear. In 1985, she returned to work on the famed Spitalfields Crypt clearance project.

Rejoining DUA in 1986, she became a site supervisor in 1987, a role which she loved and continued in until her retirement in 2020. Portia's 33-year legacy is immense. She supervised over 150 sites across London and the south-east, publishing many articles in *London Archaeologist*, other journals and contributing to MOLA publications.

Portia was a tremendous team-player with extensive knowledge of different types of archaeological sites and how to investigate and interpret them. She was at home directing great lengths of rural Strip, Map and Sample investigations on the HS1 route and A2/M2 works in Kent. She supervised sites in almost all the south London boroughs, and with expert skills in complex urban stratigraphy, she supervised sites in central London, such as the Fleet Valley Project, Guildhall Yard, Creechurch Lane, King Street and London Wall. Her meticulous excavation of the City Ditch at 7–10 Old Bailey, recovered evidence for changing environmental conditions and its use. She worked on Crossrail, on the Thameslink excavations at Borough Market and the East London Line Extension.

She loved working with young people and directed several community excavations, including at Brixton Windmill. She ran the Young Archaeologist Club (YAC) in conjunction with the Pumphouse Educational Museum for several years and worked with the Central London YAC. Colleagues remember her working on a YAC project to create a replica of the ornate gold headdress of Queen Puabi found in the royal tombs at Ur!

As a supervisor, her commitment was inspirational and she was particularly important to many women. She was MOLA's longest serving female supervisor and mentored and trained several generations of archaeologists, always happy to share.

Portia was fun to be around. She had a terrific sense of humour and never took herself too seriously. She understood the value of archaeology but also appreciated the silliness of the situations it sometimes generated. Above all, Portia was a loyal, kind friend who genuinely cared about people. She was someone you could trust and feel at ease with. A totally remarkable person who was well loved and sadly missed.

Sophie Jackson and colleagues