

FRIENDS OF FISHBOURNE ROMAN PALACE

NEWSLETTER

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Core – the effort was worth it!

Rob Symmons

We all know (or at least we should do!) that the Romans introduced fallow deer and rabbits to Britain, importing them to Fishbourne shortly after the invasion of 43 AD. It has been suggested that such imports would demonstrate a control of the natural world to a population who considered nature to be a special and sacred place. It stands to reason that, if they were importing exotic animals, surely the Romans would also have imported previously unknown plants.

Unfortunately, plant remains are not as simple to collect as animal bone, and sampling for pollen and seeds on archaeological sites was practically unheard of before the 1980s – long after Cunliffe's original excavations of the Palace. Later excavations did sample for such remains, but their preservation wasn't good enough to enable any meaningful analysis.

Last year, a team from Portsmouth University decided to remedy this, by taking a core sample from Fishbourne Harbour, just to the south of the Palace. The sample consists of a long column of sediment. Recently deposited silt will be at the top, and as you go deeper, material gets progressively older. The harbour works as a "pollen trap", collecting and preserving pollen and other plant remains, so analysing different points

along the column will create a timeline of vegetation and other environmental change into the past.

The great news is that carbon dating has shown that the 2-metre-long core extends back in time far enough to contain Roman material. Work is under way to extract and identify pollen, as well as carry out sedimentary DNA and other analyses. It should be possible to reconstruct any environmental change caused by the Romans invading, or leaving. For example, the creation of arable land, improvement of pasture or management of woodlands. And if we're really lucky, we might find some exotic plants to go with our exotic animals.

From the chair

David Bone

I hope that you all had a good Christmas and are ready for a more "normal" post-pandemic year ahead. The first thing is a reminder that the AGM has returned to its original timing and will take place on **Saturday 15th April**. Please reserve the date in your diary and attend if possible; more details will be circulated nearer the time. I have had my arm twisted and will be putting myself forward for re-election as Chair for another year. However, please do not let this stop anyone else from volunteering to take on the position!

We have an excellent committee but do need additional non-officer members if the Friends are to expand their horizons and seek further methods of fund-raising for the Palace or support activities for the membership. No experience is necessary, just a willingness to meet the challenges of being a committee member; full support is provided. One of the recent developments by the committee is the design and publication of a new leaflet / membership application form. Principally designed by Jacqui Watson and Rob Symmons, the new leaflet incorporates several essential updates on the previous content.

Other ideas that have been previously floated by the committee are ticking away in the background, including the provision of some portable, folding stools for the less able amongst us whilst visiting the North Wing of the Palace. Another new proposal is to support a series of lectures held at the Palace. These will be held three times a year – spring, summer, and autumn – and open to all including the public at a small charge. This will hopefully provide an audience that doesn't only rely on Friends attending. Named the Rudkin Lecture series in honour of David Rudkin, the first will be our AGM talk by Jacqui Watson and Anthony Haskins has been approached for the summer talk. I will give the autumn talk, probably on Roman building stone, which is closer to my expertise on local geology. Details of dates and times will follow in due course, probably after discussion at the AGM.

We are hearing about the continuing needs for the Sussex Archaeological Society to achieve a firmer financial footing as well as bringing the Palace into the 21st century as a visitor attraction. Undoubtedly, there will be great changes and I am looking forward to acting as liaison with the Society to seek opportunities for the Friends to become constructively involved with developments.

I hope to meet you at the AGM on 15th April.

Behind the Scenes tour for the Friends on Saturday 17th June.

At long last, we are running this event again – the first one since Covid lockdowns etc.

This is open to all Friends. If the event is oversubscribed, priority will be given to those who joined in the last few years (membership number is 334 or higher). Invitations will be sent out after the AGM.

We will meet in the CDC foyer for refreshments at 10.30am. It will also be a chance to meet one or two members of the committee. Then Rob Symmons, the curator will give take us round the Collections Discovery Centre. The tour is usually about 60 – 90 minutes. You are then free to have lunch in the café and/or visit the Palace.

Children aged 10 years or older are welcome.

Mary Haskins

Science Sleepover at the Palace

At the start of November we opened our doors to 12 archaeology students from Exeter University for what must be a unique event. The “Archaeological Science Module” was a 5 day residential event that introduced the students to the Palace and its collections, and help them develop their own science-based projects.

Each of the days were packed. The module attracted staff and specialists from the universities of Exeter, Oxford, and London, as well as Butser Ancient Farm and the South Downs National Park, who gave presentations and offered expertise on forensic science, DNA, human remains, experimental archaeology, conservation, x-radiography and metallurgy. We even enjoyed a lively discussion about the ethics of destructive sampling!

However, the main focus of the week was to engage the students with our collections. Freshly trained on how our collections are structured, the group, working in teams, was given free rein to explore the

stores, delving into specific sites, themes or artefact types. Site reports appeared and these were combined with primary excavations records (and a lot of googling) to identify gaps in our knowledge about the Palace. Experiments were designed to fill these gaps and then suitable experimental material had to be located and object loans negotiated.





Work often went late into the night, and a remarkable amount of pizza was consumed before we all bedded down each night on the floor of the Collections Discovery Centre. We even enjoyed a “film night” of horror movies, to mark Halloween!

By the end of the week, no fewer than seven experiments had been designed, ranging from an attempt to identify evidence of lead poisoning in pig bones, to an analysis of the pigments used to decorate the painted walls of the Palace (via an examination of the chemistry of Roman coinage). The results are yet to be returned, and when they are we are bound to know a little more about the site than we did previously. But that would miss the point: the real value of this week was to provide hands-on experience of collections and scientific analysis, and we achieved this in spades. We have had reports that, days after their return to Exeter they were “still buzzing” about their experience.

We’re pretty sure that no other museum offers an experience like this and we are looking forward to repeating it in some form to other groups, hopefully from other universities, in the future.

Rob Symmons

New for 2023!

Summer Craft Fayre

at the Palace

Saturday 8th and Sunday 9th July 2023

Volunteers will be needed – more details nearer the time

Footsore for Fishbourne

Over 6 weekends in the autumn, one of Fishbourne's costumed volunteering families took on the challenge of walking up 6 Iron Age Hillforts in all weathers, dressed in their Iron Age British and Roman costumes, to raise money for the Learning Team. Nick Barnaby, Fishbourne's familiar legionary with his partner Vikki Phillips and her daughters Daisy (11) and Ivy (8) took on the task led by the girls as part of a Girlguiding challenge, the children needed to do something for charity, and the charity they chose was Fishbourne, as it is where Nick and Vikki met and where they now volunteer as a family. Charley (Chamberlain, Learning Officer at the Palace) has always been extremely welcoming of the girls coming along to "help" and Daisy and Ivy, who enjoy participating in the events held in the holidays wanted to give something back.



We walked up St Catherine's Hill, Old Winchester Hill, Butser Hill, Harting Down and Beacon Hill, Kingley Vale and finally The Trundle and down Centurion Way to finish at Fishbourne, welcoming on this last walk Sussex Past Chief Exec Leanne O'Boyle in costume for support. We discovered a lot about how practical our kit was (Iron age shoes: terrible on mud and chalky Downland, calagae: terrible on pavements), walked in some very wet conditions and spoke to a lot of people about the Palace and why we were doing our challenge, which turned into a few new visitors that we saw again at the site. In total the girls walked 28.6 miles and raised £1135 which they have chosen to spend on new activities for families to use when they visit the museum.

They've already been in to talk to Charley about what she thinks would be best, and their achievements were recognised with a silver Blue Peter badge, a special badge awarded for kindness to the community (as well as the ones for Brownies and Guides).



If you want to see more, search **Footsore for Fishbourne** on social media and you'll see some of the photos and videos we made along the way.

Text and photos by Nick, Vikki, Daisy and Ivy

...and finally

All good sponsored events end with a presentation, so here are the intrepid walkers and an assembled gang of Romans (and Friends' Treasurer Richard) holding a big Lloyds Bank cheque for £1135, the sum raised, which has been transferred by the Barnaby family to the Friends, to be held for dispersal to the Palace, as the latter requires.



NEWSLETTER ARCHIVE

Our Newsletters are now all available online. Alex Lockton has kindly put them onto this site:

<https://archive.org>

Searching *Fishbourne* should take you there.

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