

FRIENDS OF FISHBOURNE ROMAN PALACE

NEWSLETTER

Issue no. 49

June 2023



The Westhampnett Bypass Collection: More tales from the stores

Mary Haskins

For over 3 years, I have been working on the Westhampnett Bypass collection finishing just before Easter this year. It was a big site with a lot of material to go through. Progress was slowed by the pandemic: in addition I moved house and also had some health problems.

The A27 used to go through the centre of Westhampnett village which wasn't ideal with the increasing amount of traffic in the 1980s and a bypass was needed. In 1992 Wessex Archaeology investigated the site prior to the building of the new road.

The finds ranged in time from a small number of Mesolithic worked flints to some Anglo-Saxon burials with something from most periods in between. The majority of the finds in the store come from the large Iron Age cemetery. The cemetery was considered so important, that Volume 2 of the monograph with details of the cemetery area and the grave catalogue was published ahead of Volume 1.

This collection (over 50 boxes) was very demanding as I had to consult the paper archive for some information but the pottery from the Iron Age and Romano-British graves made up for that. Nearly all the grave goods have been drawn and published in volume 2 (390 pottery vessels). A few vessels were intact or almost intact but the majority were just a bag of sherds. It was lovely to be able to refer to the appropriate illustration to see how the vessel would have looked. A few of the better ones were in the Mystery Warrior exhibition at the Novium (2020) and are now part of the permanent display in the Novium.

Continued over

Here are some of my favourites that are still in the store at Fishbourne:



This is a late Iron Age cremation urn which was found during the evaluation of the site. It was on public display in the old museum. When it was taken off display, it needed some conservation work and was sent to West Dean College. Its return to the Fishbourne store was well timed as I was working on the pottery from the graves then.



This set of reconstructed bowls was from one of the Romano-British graves. There were some larger vessels in this grave but they are still in pieces.



Some of the smaller Iron Age pots and bowls survive more or less one piece.



This flask is slightly wonky and I can understand why it was initially recorded as a 'waster' but its small size and shape made it robust, so it survived intact.

Friends AGM April 2023

The AGM was attended by 14 people and 11 apologies were received. Fortunately, this was quorate by just one person above the minimum required by the Constitution.

As usual, a report from the Palace by Rob Symmons started proceedings. As well as special events, Rob was pleased to announce a project led by Portsmouth University that involved taking a sediment core in Chichester Harbour (see *last Newsletter*). A project by Exeter University has involved 3D scanning of the four Fishbourne intaglios, which will enable further investigation into them. Also from Exeter University, a placement student Bob Cooper, has digitised and catalogued 2,500 slides, become a proficient mosaic cleaner, and undertaken many other useful jobs. Rob was also able to announce the safe arrival of the model sponsored by the Friends and created by a Bournemouth University arts student (see *below*).

Matters arising from the previous AGM were discussed. These were further investigation of Gift Aid and agreement that it would not be further pursued, options for the Friends to purchase folding stools and the possibility of a Blue Plaque commemorating David Rudkin. The latter two items are still being looked into.

The Chair's report by David Bone started with thanks to Anne de Potier for production of the newsletter and maintaining the website, and to Jacqui Watson and Rob Symmons for

producing the new, updated Friends leaflet. He was able to report the funding of several Palace applications. These were £2,000 for a greenhouse, £1,000 for café kitchen items, and £1,000 towards a PA system. The Friends also received £1,135 donation from the Barnaby family fund raising walk, which will be used by the Learning Team at the Palace. Lastly, it is disappointing to report that membership numbers have sharply dropped from 77 at the 2022 to AGM to 63 (now up to 65 at the time of writing).

The Treasurer's report by Richard New for the tax year 2021-22 noted that membership fees raised £1,202, a decrease from the previous year. Additional monies were received from donations (£994) and events (£256). Funding to the Palace totalled £1,549 for four large earthenware planters along the entrance road.

There was one Resolution that was voted on, this being an amendment to the Constitution to limit only Officers to a 4-year term of office. This was to allow retention of experienced committee members when there is a shortage of volunteers and was unanimously agreed. The existing committee was then re-elected without change to serve for the forthcoming year.

The only discussions under Any Other Business were the decline in membership numbers and the future of the Rudkin lectures, now that the Palace have decided to run their own lecture programme. Both these items are currently being investigated by the committee.

David Bone

Curator considers a career in modelling (No! Not *that* kind of modelling!)

Visitors to the Palace will know that we rely on our famous model to interpret the site to the public. Indeed, every tour starts at the main model in the museum foyer. It's the perfect way to show what the building would have looked like at its height in AD 75. It's also much more reliable, simpler, cheaper (probably) and greener than a digital reconstruction.

Less famous and maybe less loved than our main model are the three that can be found inside the museum itself. Also made by Thorpe model makers of Grays Inn Road, London, these show the progression of the site from military base (AD 43) to "proto-palace" (AD 60) and culminating in the Flavian Palace (AD 75) that we all associate with Fishbourne. However, it has always bothered me that the story told by the models stops there, even though the story of the site continued for another 200 years at least.

That's why, when in July 2021 we were contacted by a student looking for a final year project for his degree in model making, our eyes lit up. The student, Jules Rinterknecht, was looking for a challenge to show off the skills he had learned during his undergraduate course at Bournemouth Arts University and we had just the thing for him: to build a model of the Palace as it would have appeared in AD 280, just before it was destroyed by fire.

It's well known that, surprisingly soon after its construction, the Flavian Palace started to show signs of wear and tear. By the early second century rooms were starting to be remodelled, and elements of the North Wing were being demolished, presumably because they were suffering from subsidence, or because they were too costly to maintain. Eventually the bathhouse was demolished and relocated (twice!) and the monumental entrance hall fell into disrepair, although it was still in use until the very end. It's possible to get the sense of this building, built with little or no expense spared (presumably with money from the imperial centre), having to contract when central support was withdrawn and it had to earn its keep.

Jules' challenge was to understand and then illustrate this decline in a 1:400 scale model. (*His account of how he did this is in the February 2022 Newsletter. Rob now gives his side of the story- Ed.*)

Step one was a deep dive into Cunliffe's 1971 site report, not only to understand the nature of the Flavian Palace, but also how it changed in the years between AD 75-280. This was no mean feat for a model-making student with zero archaeological experience. What quickly became clear (and perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of this project) is that



Cunliffe had little to say about the decline of the South or West wings. We decided that to assume these were largely unaffected by the later decline would be a safer option than inventing a level of dilapidation that may never have occurred. Some "educated guesses" had to be made, like the removal of the formal garden's box hedging, which surely would never have lasted 200 years.

Countless emails, diagrams and photographs of work in progress followed, before Jules finally sent a file of images of the finished model. To say we were impressed would be something of an understatement! The problem we now faced was transporting a fragile and surprisingly large model from Bournemouth to Fishbourne safely and economically. Thanks should go to our friends at Bournemouth University, which neighbours the Arts University, for adopting the model for a period and displaying it in the archaeology department until it could hitch a lift to the Palace with a group on a field trip in early May this year.



The model is even more impressive in real life and has been a huge hit with everyone who has seen it. At the moment it is on display in the sensitive store window in the Collections Discovery Centre, so visible only to visitors to that building.

We hope to unleash it on our wider visitor-base just as soon as we have worked out how to do it safely! We'd like to thank the Friends who contributed to the cost of building the model. Even though it's not on public display at the moment, you have supported a talented student and the research that was the foundation of the project was an invaluable experience for all involved.

Rob Symmons

2023 SUMMER TALK

**The excavation of the
Holme Fen Spitfire X4593 Kerala**



**Anthony Haskins
(Oxford Archaeology)**

Saturday 22nd July 2023 at 2pm
Fishbourne Roman Palace, PO19 3QR

Admission: Members £5.00
Non members £10.00
Light refreshments included

To book your place contact Mary Haskins
fishbournefriends@googlemail.com

The Friends of Fishbourne Roman Palace Summer

2023 Talk will be by Anthony Haskins. Anthony graduated from York University in 2002 with a BSc in Archaeology and then in 2004 with an MSc in Zooarchaeology. He has worked for Oxford Archaeology since 2007. He has particular interests in the Late Upper Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and aviation archaeology.

He led the excavation of the Holme Fen Spitfire, which was filmed by the BBC for Country File Remembrance Day programme that year. He was also involved with the excavation of P51D Mustang 'Ellie May' and Halifax Bomber LL587.

Outside of Oxford Archaeology, Anthony was involved the People of the Heath community excavation project at Petersfield Heath and he wrote the chapter on flint in the monograph.

Book by email fishbournefriends@googlemail.com

Note : The SAS marketing team are advertising the event to the general public later in June and it will be possible to buy tickets through their website BUT they are unable to offer the £5 Friends tickets. **So book now through the Friends and don't miss out!**

Report from the Chair

The AGM, held on 15th April, has been reported elsewhere, so I will only touch on a couple of issues that were also covered in subsequent discussions and meetings. Firstly, however, thank you very much to those who managed to attend the AGM and apologies were gratefully accepted from several members who could not. We managed to be quorate for the AGM by just one additional person, which meant that we could update the constitution and agree on other future actions. The existing committee was also voted in unanimously; perhaps, not surprising but we are always ready to welcome new volunteers.

Crucially, we have seen an 18% fall in membership over the last year and our knowledge of the membership profile suggests further reductions will follow. If this decline continues, The Friends of Fishbourne may find themselves in a similar situation to many societies and groups post-pandemic with having to consider closing down. On a more positive note, the awareness of this possibility is leading the committee to consider many options, including the means to attract new members.

One of these ideas, already publicised, is a series of public talks, one each for the spring (the afternoon of the AGM), summer and autumn seasons. As you may know, the Palace have also proposed a series of monthly public lectures, so we have agreed to coordinate on these with the Palace taking the lead. This is because of their better access to publicity and a wider audience network. Consequently, our suggestion of a grand title of "the Rudkin lectures" is likely to be relegated to a single annual talk, probably the talk after the AGM. The talks can be on any subject so, if you can offer something or know someone who can, please let us know.

We are also looking at the future of the website and seeking a presence on social media to reach a younger audience. Please let the committee know if you can help with this or, indeed, whether you would be willing to join the committee. Any help and new ideas would be welcomed.

Thank you all for your continuing support of the Friends and the provision of much needed funds to support the Palace, which we know are very much appreciated.

David Bone

Social media – can you help?



The Friends have a well-established website but, whether we like it or not, social media is as important or even more so these days. Are there any members who could assist the committee with setting up and maintaining a presence for the Friends on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram? Unfortunately, the committee does not have the necessary expertise. Can you help?

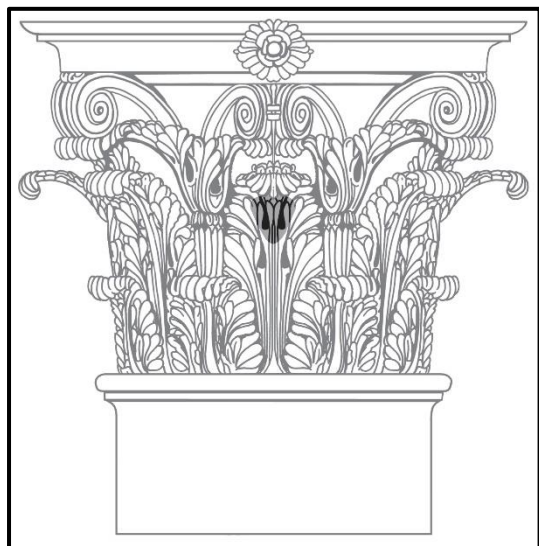
A lost Roman villa in Bognor Regis?

A talk given at the 2023 AGM by David and Anne Bone

Introducing themselves, David described his many years of studying and publishing on West Sussex geology with particular interest in historic building stones. Anne was a former curator and manager of Chichester District Museum and Heritage Lead at South Downs National Park Authority. Together, they are a team ably suited to investigate the interaction of archaeology and geology.

David started by describing a study he published in 2016 on the distribution of 60 plus historic building stones at 258 churches in West Sussex. The experience gained from this provided a background to the investigation of building stones from archaeological sites, including the reuse of Roman buildings stones in medieval construction. Examples of this include the reuse of Roman brick and tile such as at Westhampnett church, just east of Chichester.

Other Roman stones are less obvious to the untrained eye, including *Ditrupa* limestone. Named after the characteristic fossil, a small straw-like marine worm tube, this white limestone only came from the Calcaire Grossier rocks of north-west Gaul in Roman times. Any pieces of this limestone therefore indicate a Roman origin and typically was used for important pieces of architectural stonework. There are several find spots of *Ditrupa* limestone in West Sussex, including a column base at Fishbourne Palace, rubble in Bosham church and old walls in Chichester, and reused as a Saxon cross on display in Pagham church.



Reconstruction of the Roman capital; dark shading in centre shows fragment recovered. Drawn by Archaeology South East.

Our attention then turned to a 19th C terraced cottage in West Street, Bognor Regis, map evidence suggesting construction between 1817 and 1825. During renovation works, demolition of an interior wall produced several large pieces of rubble including a rounded, probably waterworn, piece of *Ditrupa* limestone. This was subsequently identified as a small part of a very accomplished Corinthian capital, comprising the *cauliculus* and acanthus calyx from towards the top of the capital, possibly from a monumental entrance. Martin Henig of Oxford ascribed this to the late Neronian and Flavian period with similar examples occurring at Bath, Silchester and Canterbury. The most likely and highly plausible explanation for its presence is that it came from one of the 1st C elite villas that are found along the Sussex coast, including Fishbourne, Angmering and Southwick.

So, how did this fragment end up in Bognor Regis? Several possibilities were discussed. A 'Grand Tour' souvenir was discounted as these are usually statues, pottery, or inscriptions and originate from the Mediterranean region, rather than north-west France. Similarly, its derivation from an offshore Roman wreck was discounted as none are known and there have been no similar finds. It also shows no signs of marine borings or encrustations, although it does appear to be waterworn. Could the piece have originated in Fishbourne and been taken to Bognor as a part-load of reused building stone? There is strong evidence that

Bognor had a plentiful supply of local stone from the foreshore reef of the Bognor Rocks, until removal of stone was prohibited in c. 1828 because of the negative impact on coastal erosion. Indeed, Bognor was an exporter of stone as is shown by the use of Bognor Rock in Chichester.

Inspection of the Historic Environment Record reveals that Bognor Regis is surrounded by numerous Iron Age field systems and many Roman small finds have been made. These and the recent discovery of the Bersted Warrior burial all point to an elite late Iron Age / Roman presence in the area. Barry Cunliffe suggested that the coastal villas, which appeared more or less complete in the 1st C are the Romanised homes of the "tribal aristocracy". Is it possible that there was a villa at Bognor Regis?

It can be positively stated that the capital fragment is stylistically late 1st C AD and made of high quality imported Roman stone. It is not from a Grand Tour, a shipwreck, or reused stone from outside the area. It was common practice to use stone obtained from the foreshore as building material, and the fragment appears to be waterworn. It is also known that significant coastal erosion has occurred, averaging around 0.4 m per year, which could be up to 1 km since the 1st C. Finally, there is a gap around Bognor Regis in the known distribution pattern of the coastal villa sites. Could this one piece of stone therefore suggest the former presence of a Roman villa, now lost to the sea? David and Anne think that it does, and the findings were published in Sussex Archaeological Collections (2020).

David Bone

Don't forget!

Summer Craft Fayre

at the Palace

Saturday 8th and Sunday 9th July 2023

If you can offer to help on the Friends' stall please email Debbie Mansfield (Secretary) using the Friends' email address fishbournefriends@googlemail.com

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.

Editor: Anne de Potier

Published by
The Friends of Fishbourne Roman Palace
Roman Way, Salthill Road, Fishbourne
Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 3QR
fishbournefriends@googlemail.com
www.fishbournefriends.info