

FRIENDS OF FISHBOURNE ROMAN PALACE NEWSLETTER

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Windows into Ancient Recycling at Fishbourne Roman Palace

A new collaborative project between Fishbourne Palace, Newcastle University and Butser Ancient Farm

In the mid-late 1st century AD, the innovation of glassblowing democratised glass, with a rapid expansion in production and use facilitated by the movement of the Roman army. Roman literary sources of the same period see a sudden swathe of allusions to glass, with a particular interest in its potential for recycling, epitomised by the figure of the glass peddler, who trades broken glasses for sulphur in several of the Flavian literary sources. Yet significant questions remain about the nature and scale of recycling practice, and its impact upon our models of the Roman economy. Glimpses of what we are missing occasionally surface, as with the 2nd century glass recycling dump at Guildhall Yard, London. Moreover, there has long existed a puzzling discrepancy between records of the scale of glass window production for use in bathhouses and the tiny volume of surviving glass window fragments at archaeological sites, described by Jennifer Price as a “yawning gap” in the evidence: could window glass be the key to unpacking recycling?



Fragments of glass from the Fishbourne excavations

The trade of glass across the Roman Empire can be traced by chemical analysis that reveals different recipes and raw ingredients sources, but the data at present is severely skewed towards vessel glasses, and interpreted with the assumption that

most glassblowers were using fresh, rather than recycled glass. Yet if Price's "yawning gap" is explained by the extensive recycling of window glass into other objects including vessels, this has profound implications for our understanding of the entire industry and for Roman recycling more broadly.

The Palace holds over 450 fragments of vessel glass, more than 30 fragments of glass jewellery, and a whopping 2755 window glass panes and fragments, the latter all coming from a single, 3rd century deposit. The advantage of this assemblage lies in the quantity of glass panes and the limited context in which they were found, having been removed from the bathhouse windows and stacked in a workshop area in the North Wing before its destruction by fire.

This rare opportunity to sample and chemically analyse a single deposit of window glass will be extremely valuable in identifying chemical 'markers' of recycling whether the windows were made from the same glass batch(es), and whether there is a recycling relationship with contemporary vessel glass from elsewhere at the site. Furthermore, experimental reproduction, recycling and analysis of Roman windows will for the first time practically test the relationship between the scale of recycling and its chemical visibility. Exciting recent scholarship has thrown up examples at Roman sites of the dismantling and recycling of materials such as lead pipes and glass on an organisational scale not previously recognised. The potential for this at Fishbourne will be investigated by a re-examination of the excavation archives and a potential re-interpretation of activities in the North Wing.

As well as work on the collection at Fishbourne and its interpretation and display, there will also be a project at Butser to publicly recreate and recycle windows in a permanent Roman-style, wood-fired furnace in their new 'hot-working' area.

The project will also involve a postgraduate studentship, so look out for another new face around the Palace.

Anne de Potier, based on text by Dr Chloe Duckworth, Newcastle University.



Fishbourne Palace held their "Christmas Craft Fayre" on Saturday 18th November.



It was not so well attended as the Summer Fayre in July 2023, understandably, given the weather, but they did equal the attendance from the Winter Fayre, the first of these events, in November 2022. FFRP had a stall, right in front of the frieze from Trajan's Column, in the museum space, where we were joined by a lot of other craft and charity organisations. We were trying to raise the profile of the Society and we did have a lot of people show interest, and we passed on a large number of the FFRP brochure/application forms – it remains to be seen how much response we get from that. There were carols sung by a local choir, and plenty to eat and drink. Altogether, it was quite a jolly occasion!

The picture shows our Secretary Debbie at the stall, in front of the Trajan's Column frieze.

Text and image: Richard New

Report from the Chair

The years seem to pass by very quickly these days and, as I write this, we are already well into January 2024. I belatedly pass on the Christmas message from Amanda Jones (Chair, SAS Council of Trustees); *"We write to you on behalf of all Trustees to say the most enormous thank you for all that you and your committees and members have done this year, and indeed always do, to support the Society's wonderful properties. In these difficult times the dedication, commitment and support you provide has been all the more amazing and so very much appreciated - as too, your endless patience and understanding for everything the Society is doing as it seeks a more secure future"*.

Since the last newsletter, I regret to report that the Sussex Archaeological Society has had to make further staff reductions. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend the SAS AGM at Michelham Priory in December, so cannot provide details at this time. On a positive note, I have had a meeting with Chloe Andrews, Sussex Past Volunteer Coordinator regarding possibilities for coordination of the different SAS Friends groups, something that Amanda Jones has previously initiated. I await further developments.

The Friends of Fishbourne AGM is sneaking up on us and during preparations for this, I discover in the Minutes of the 2022 AGM (Point 9; Election of Officers) *"No volunteers have come forward for the post of Chairman so David Bone has agreed to serve until the next AGM and will then retire"*. So, I should be stepping down this April, but it will come as no surprise that the committee has not found a volunteer to take on the role. I will therefore be putting myself forward for election as Chair for another year up to April 2025. Please let me know if anybody wants to think about taking on the role of Chair in due course. You would be most welcome to shadow me if this would help.

Details of the forthcoming AGM on **Saturday 20 April** will be issued in the near future, but I will remind you that Mary Haskins will resign as Membership Secretary. We do have a volunteer waiting to step forward, but we could really do with an 'Events Secretary' to particularly lead on arranging our talks programme. It is not onerous, and help will be provided – would you be willing to volunteer? In the meantime, Mary Haskins has offered to continue organising the talks for 2024. We are unsure whether this will be in conjunction with talks organised by the Palace as Sue Webber, who was responsible for this, has left to work elsewhere,

We are also pleased to announce that the Friends have supported (in part) the purchase of portable folding chairs to assist less able people to visit the palace following our recommendation of the preferred supplier. So, your subscriptions continue to support the Palace in ways that fall outside the direct SAS remit. Your contributions are very much appreciated.

David Bone

AGM talk: The Roman Army at Fishbourne AD43-44 by John Smith

What did the Roman Army ever do for us? John will consider what part the army played in the early years after the invasion in creating Roman Britannia. He will look at the different types of soldiers – legionaries, auxiliaries and marines and their different roles within the Roman army. He will conclude with the probable advance of a column towards the Mendip Hills in Somerset. The talk will be illustrated with the archaeological evidence and with replica armour and other equipment.

Operation Nightingale

A talk at Fishbourne by Richard Osgood, October 2023



What does practical archaeology mean for you? Anyone who has done any will think anticipation, discovery, dirt, heat (or cold) and so on – but what about therapy, restoration and healing? Op Nightingale was set up in 2011 originally to involve veterans from Afghanistan who were trying to cope with traumatic injury, PTSD and the challenges of civvy life, and to support their health and wellbeing by getting them involved in archaeological investigations. Richard, already an archaeologist for the MOD, explained that his inspiration had been the novel *A month in the country* by JL Carr. That book describes how a veteran found healing from uncovering a mural in a church.

Richard went on to describe several projects that the team had done, some of which are still ongoing: burials on Rat (or Burrow) Island in Portsmouth Harbour; the 'Band of Brothers' in Aldbourne, Wiltshire (there is a Time Team YouTube video on this), and two sites on Salisbury Plain: Barrow Clump and Avon Camp. They have also helped with projects at Butser, which readers may have seen. Sites are chosen for their location and to provide some interesting archaeology. Richard says the process of carefully uncovering the finds is part of the therapeutic process, as it helps to focus the mind and provides a sense of achievement.

Apart from enjoying the practical archaeology, and in some cases applying existing skills, those taking part have learned about managing different skills, interests, abilities (and disabilities) and expectations, and that it is OK to ask veterans to work on graves and burials. The veterans appreciated being part of a team again, and were also better than civilians at working in bad weather! Several have taken degree courses, and some now work as professional archaeologists. Richard has written a book *Broken Pots, Mending Lives* on the project thus far. A non-profit company, Breaking Ground Heritage, was formed by a veteran to work alongside Op Nightingale, and the projects go from strength to strength.

Anne de Potier

Also at Butser ...



... there is a new Roman-style garden. As well as featuring appropriate plants, it is also has a mosaic made from rescued Roman tesserae from a site now under the M4. It will be of interest to many Friends members to know that the garden was in part a memorial to the late Joan Rundle, a stalwart volunteer there and our sometime membership Secretary.

Re-phasing the Palace?



Hello Friends of Fishbourne, some of you may have seen me around the palace as of late but I thought it would be best to write a small introduction to my project, so you are all aware of some 'exciting' research taking place. My name is Keir I am an undergraduate student at Bournemouth University currently on my placement year, which is what brought me to Fishbourne; my interests in archaeology vary wildly however my primary interest is in Roman Britain.

My project (colloquially called FISH24) is a continuation of the skills I have learnt previously, I will be using the original 1960's archive plan drawings to create a new digital site plan that is geolocated and phased. We have had great early successes with this portion of the project, with almost all the original site drawings being digitised by myself only a fortnight into the project beginnings.

I am using the program AutoCAD to complete the digitisation of these drawings, a program primarily used by architects to design buildings, however in recent years it has begun to be adopted by archaeologists to create figures. If any of you would like to see my work, I am usually found in the research room of the Collections Discovery Centre.

However, it is the next phase of the project which will be time consuming, using a selection of artefacts and the site notebooks available to me, Curator Rob and I are going to look at re-phasing the site through artefactual study aided by the resources at the Palace. This is a huge undertaking, and I will be writing small updates along the way to keep you all informed.

Keir Broughton

The photo shows Keir at Winterbourne Kingston, Dorset, aka the Durotriges Big Dig project run by Bournemouth University.

Save the date!

Our summer talk will be 'Lepers on the Hill' by Lesley Johnson, an osteoarchaeologist. It will be at 2pm Saturday 20th July in the Rudkin Room with light refreshments afterwards. Lesley is a volunteer for the Novium Museum working on their collections at Fishbourne.

In memory

Long standing life member Mrs M C Pater-noster died in December. She is survived by her husband Michael.

Editor: Anne de Potier

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