

Report on Fishbourne Workshop

In April 2022, the ‘From feed the birds’ to ‘Do not feed the animals’ team held a workshop with project partner Sussex Archaeological Society at Fishbourne Roman Palace. The meeting was an opportunity to provide an update on current research, and discuss the translation of academic research into public-facing outputs.

We kicked off with a tour of the museum led by Dr Rob Symmons, Curator of Fishbourne Roman Palace (Figure 1). The museum covers the north wing of the enormous palace constructed c. AD 75 and destroyed by a fire around AD 290. The uniqueness of the site was realised during the 1960s excavations, and funding secured to build a structure over part of the site and enable many of the archaeological features – such as a mosaic of Cupid atop a dolphin – to remain *in situ*.



Figure 1: Rob shows the team his hypocaust. Only one room had this underfloor heating, and the while Fishbourne Palace certainly looked impressive, you would have been cosier in a roundhouse!

Rob also gave a behind-the-scenes look at the Collections Discovery Centres which hold archaeological material recovered from excavations at Fishbourne and other sites in the Chichester area (Figure 2). Here he discussed the practicalities of archaeological curation, including environmental control, storage of paper records, dealing with legacies of different records management systems, and providing access to researchers.

The discussion also included destructive analysis, something many of the Postdoctoral and PhD researchers are undertaking as part of DNFTA. Rob’s personal opinion was that he would rather curate *stories* than *material*. For him the destructive analysis that has been performed on the animal bones from Fishbourne – including fallow deer and rabbits which were found to be the earliest evidence of both species in Britain, some ~1000 years before previously believed – have enhanced our understanding of the site and Roman Britain more than they had when complete. However, there was recognition that this material is not a limitless resource, and destructive analysis must be justifiable and the results provided to the archive at the earliest opportunity. Where possible 3D scanning should also be undertaken to provide a model of the bone before any sampling.

Naomi Sykes provided an overview of the re-analysis that has been conducted on the animal bones from Fishbourne over the past 20 years. This was followed by Felix Sadebeck with a presentation on the treatment of maladies in cattle during the Roman period based on his analysis of classical texts.

Figure 2: The Collections Discovery Centre at Fishbourne Roman Palace hold thousands of boxes of bones, pottery, glass. Yet Rob would rather curate 'stories' than 'material'



Reanalysis of the animal bones from Fishbourne suggests that there were dedicated animal enclosures, such as *vivaria*, *leporaria* and *piscinae*, despite the absence of any physical evidence of these structures. The palace is considered to have been the residence of the local client king, *Togidubnis*, or a high-ranking Roman official, and discussion turned to the role the exotic animals played. The animals undoubtedly enhanced the splendour and pleasure of spaces, but they also demonstrated wealth, status, and international connections. But could they be considered a menagerie? a zoo? Does this expression of Roman Imperial power bare similarities with the menageries of Europe during the early-modern period?

We discussed with Rob the production of a leaflet which can be given to visitors, as well as a QR code trail which invites people to learn more about the animals kept at the site and the results generated by the project.

Thank you very much to everyone who took part in the meeting, we really value your time and contribution. Please keep in touch with the team if you have questions or ideas between now and our next meeting.