

TRADING WITH SCHOOLS presents

ROMAN BRISTOL



8th July 2015
09:30 - 16:30
Oasis Academy Long Cross

£130 per delegate

A one day course to support primary teachers and/or history leaders in developing a unit of work, which focuses on how the Romano British culture shaped the city of Bristol.

To book, please contact:
tradingwithschools@bristol.gov.uk
or phone (0117) 922 2444

TRADING
WITH
SCHOOLS



BRISTOL LEARNING CITY

WHY ARCHAEOLOGICAL ARCHIVES MATTER: PROVIDING ARCHAEOLOGY FOR ALL

July 25, 2015 Gail Boyle Archives, Curation, Education, Explore Posts, Museum
Archaeology archives, Community Archaeology, Finds, museum cuts, Museums

Today I thought I would write something specifically about the way my working life revolves around archives so what follows below is a personal musing about them as sources of inspiration, collective knowledge and latterly of concern.

Learning in all its forms is really at the heart of much of what I do. Since the National Curriculum has been remodelled I've been working on delivering a series of CPD sessions aimed at local primary school teachers. Our 'Bristol Curriculum' is a model we use for locally-

relevant learning that uses Bristol-specific examples to enable teachers to plan and deliver schemes of work. It struck me as I delivered 'Roman Bristol', that it would have been impossible without the wide range of artefacts that had been derived from excavations and most importantly the published interpretation of sites that existed in the local landscape 2000 years ago. One of the many skills a museum archaeologist needs to have is the ability to 'translate' excavation reports for the benefit of a public audience: we need to be able to understand the detail revealed by field reports as well as academic theory. Introducing teachers to Gaius Sentius and the daughter/wife for whom he had a commissioned a tombstone found at Sea Mills in the 1870s was a joy, but the context in which they might have lived could have only been provided by the excavation archives held in store. With a 100+ years of digging out at the Roman town of Abona there's a lot of stuff that's been studied and still waiting to be studied!

And isn't that the point? **Museum archaeological archives are a living resource not just a bunch of dusty boxes full of spent objects that have already revealed their all.** The importance of these archives is that they can and should be used over and over again, especially as new sites and new techniques reveal more and more pieces of the jigsaw. Perhaps equally importantly they can be used for very different purposes by very different people.

At the moment we are well into dissertation season – by that I mean many students are looking for suitable material to study, and of course the archives we look after should be the open book they're looking to for inspiration. Although many collections are well-documented, and some available in digital format online, you can't beat looking at the real thing: you simply can't turn a digital record image over to look at that particular feature, mark, etc. that will add value to a proper study. Similarly you can't underestimate the genuine need to be able to make comparisons between several groups of objects at the same time. Museums, their stores and their curators, many of whom have acquired a vast working knowledge of the content of hundreds of archives, are a far better bet for helping to reveal connections between sites and objects than using an online search engine. One of my biggest frustrations is that whilst there is so much potential for inspiration and learning there are not enough hours in the day to take advantage of it all and the numbers of specialist curators with the skills and vision to unlock this potential are dwindling.

On the positive side, the range of enquiries I receive is enormous: in recent weeks I have been visited by researchers wanting to look at Palaeolithic material from Hampshire and photographic surveys of a Bristol dry dock made by a local unit in the 1990s. I have been asked to verify that we still hold material recorded on a local HER and to shed light on its documented provenance. Post doctoral researchers have enquired about collections of human remains relevant to an AHRC grant application and I have given advice on how to demonstrate impact without creating an exhibition. We have also had members of a local

community history project jumping for joy because they felt so privileged to be able to take photographs of real objects found in their locality to post on their website.

Unfortunately on the negative side I am very well aware of just how many of these archives are at threat of having no final resting place, with no specialist care and consequently with precious little guaranteed public access. As Chair of the Society for Museum Archaeology I am frequently being asked to write letters of concern regarding the continued long term care of archives because of museum closures or staff cuts as the result of austerity measures. In fact I was asked to do that for yet another museum today. What can we do stop this? It is my very firm belief that we will only be able to do this by acting together as one profession because to be honest that is the only way we will get our voices heard. We need to play to our strengths – if we truly believe that our raison d'être is to inspire others with the collections we acquire, study and care for, we need to use them more effectively to inspire the policy makers who hold the purse strings and to make them understand why they are so important to so many people. As archaeologists we need to find the locally relevant agendas, make ourselves aware of appropriate wider local and national issues and arm ourselves with fighting facts and figures. We need to show that #WeAreAllArchaeologists and most of all how vital it is that we continue to be a source of inspiration and learning by providing archaeology for all.

Follow the Society for Museum Archaeology on Twitter @socmusarch and visit the website at www.socmusarch.org.uk for membership details and to find out more about the work that it does.