

Nuntius

NEWS, VIEWS AND
WHAT'S ON AT
BRADING ROMAN VILLA

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF BRADING ROMAN VILLA

Chairman's letter:

Our sister charity, the Oglander Roman Trust, recently held its AGM and the chairman, Anthony Turnbull, would like to share with us the very encouraging results the Villa achieved during its trading year ended March, 2011. Anthony writes:-

“ Although economic circumstances have not improved since last year, I am delighted to be able to report that the Oglander Roman Trust has made a modest surplus on a trading basis. This result is attributable to the hard work of our wonderful staff under the inspiring leadership of our Chief Executive, Chris Piggott, and to the absolutely invaluable efforts of our Friends, without whose voluntary assistance we would not be able to exist.

In carrying out the charities' aims, due regard is paid to the Charity Commission guidance on public benefit and we continue to ensure that the ethos of open accessibility is fostered throughout events, programmes, projects and day to day running of the facility. All projects are undertaken in the spirit of community involvement and active partnership, working wherever possible to include local family groups, schools and neighbourhoods. This year's programmes have included working with troubled young people through the Catch 22 scheme, continuing to support a work placement for the "No Barriers" Adult Learning Disability scheme, Fathers and Children workshop sessions and a thriving work experience programme for both Island and mainland schools.

The site has hosted events as diverse as the UNESCO International Iraq Catastrophe exhibition and the unique Brannon exhibition of nineteenth century engravings. We took part in Heritage Open Days and

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Museums at Night, were a host museum for BBC Children's "Relic" programme and participated in the "History of the World in 100 Objects" programme. Visitors to the Villa ranged from liaison teams of other museums, to tourist parties and yacht clubs, historical societies and radio clubs. The full mobility access of the site makes it popular to groups representing those with disabilities. Events hosted have included booking by Marie Curie volunteers and the Parkinson's Society, Isle of Wight Society Conservation Awards and Friends of Osborne House supper evening. Arts Away sponsored performance and outdoor theatre, local artist exhibition space, Hands On workshops and extended Christmas opening times have helped to offset a fall in secondary advertising corporate bookings.

The Villa's educational programme continues to provide a wide range of activities and resources for the community delivered through its lifelong learning ethos. In addition to the schools and lecture programmes, this spring has featured an exciting open exhibition/experience based around "Alice in Wonderland" theme. Created on a shoestring, utilising loans from the public of related material and hours of volunteer time in creating installations, visitors were able to wander freely through exhibits and interact with objects and materials throughout the site. Live performance readings from the text of the Alice novels were an added attraction in the Villa Forum café.

During the year, Brading Roman Villa obtained Museum accreditation, an important step in our development and one that opens to us potential new streams of grant income. The ever-popular Forum café this year achieved a Quality Assured IW Hospitality Award run through IOW Council, Chamber of Commerce and Tourism South East and maintained its top 5 Star Award under the Food Standards Agency Hygiene Rating Scheme. The Oglander Roman Trust aims to create a Green Heritage Beacon of the Villa site and it is represented on the Green Towns initiative locally on the Green Town steering group, holding the sustainable energy portfolio, and nationally through active membership of the Mayday environmental network.

Finally, may I thank every one of our Friends who has given their time and experience so generously over the last year! I have no doubt that next year will present new challenges but am equally sure that, with your help, we shall be able to meet those challenges and offer our visitors an increasingly complex and enjoyable experience.

*Anthony Turnbull,
Chairman, Oglander Roman Trust* ”

Friends' activities

If you haven't seen it yet, one of the highlights this year has been the renovation and installation of a display cabinet for the museum. It represents many hours of dedicated work by a small team of volunteers. Now in place and fitted with a de-humidifier, gifted by the Friends, it provides quality additional display space inside the museum.

The summer season saw the conservationists working on the mosaics. The guides prepared for this with a series of workshops to help them answer visitors' questions. As always, much of the fascination for visitors is watching archaeology in action. The conservators' delicate work seldom gets to be centre stage in the same way as mattocks and trowels in an open trench, but it is just as important and the conservators this year have provided a deeper understanding of our mosaics and the Villa's story.

Not to be outdone the garden team have continued their work outdoors and have added a plant table to their portfolio. Next time you visit, do look at the plants on offer. You can pick up a plant in exchange for a donation or, if you have small plants to give us, please contact Erica on 01983 612029. Please label any donated plants to avoid confusion.

MEMBERSHIP ISSUES

In spite of the current economic situation our membership numbers are strong and stable. We are delighted, and very grateful, that so many of you continue your support for the Villa through the Friends. It is more important now than ever to make ends meet. Trustees have worked very hard over the last few months looking closely at how we work, simplifying what we do and finding ways to reduce the costs associated with the services The Friends provide. This edition of Nuntius is a bit different. It still gives you all the news of The Friends and Villa activities, but the smaller, black and white format actually reduces production costs by half.

Just like every other family in the land, we are economising wherever we can so the Villa continues to get maximum benefit from Friends' support.

We would like to thank all of you who allow us to contact you by email as this provides a significant cost saving on printing and postage costs. If you change your email address please don't forget to tell us.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

At the last AGM we did say that having held subscriptions at the same level for three years we would need to reconsider it for next year. The

Trustees have reluctantly agreed that the subscription will need to rise in 2012 to £15 and £21 for individual and joint memberships respectively. To help reduce the administration time and costs The Friends will move to twice-yearly renewal dates instead of the current month-by-month renewals. These changes will take effect from 1 Jan 2012 and each member will have a personal reminder to explain how the changes will affect their next renewal.

On renewal, your membership cards will be available for you to collect from reception. Again this change is helping to cut down on our postage costs and ensures cards do not get lost in the post.

The changes we have made to the way we work are already making a difference to our running costs and other plans we have in mind for the future will ensure that the Villa continues to benefit from The Friends' support. However, we must now make an urgent appeal for new volunteers, particularly to join our admin team. This has become a serious issue. Could you offer your help as a volunteer? Are you able to recruit a new member for us who might be able to help? Please make contact with us if you can. Various opportunities are available and if you would like to participate you will be very welcome.

Mary Clements

Chairman , The Friends of Brading Roman Villa

Mosaic Conservation: August 2011

This summer season, the focus has been on conservation and cleaning of the walls and mosaics in the west range, funded by a grant from English Heritage.

Paul Simpson, who works for the County Museum Service, has been involved in conservation work at Brading for about 20 years. He took part in the post-flood work in the 1990s, when he was trained by Carol Edwards, a top-ranking conservator. This was a unique opportunity for him to learn from the best and this summer he was able to pass on his expertise; there are few opportunities for conservators to practise these essential skills. Paul gave a training session to the volunteer guides so we could inform the visitors and, hopefully, stop them from distracting him with questions.

An inspection in summer 2010 showed walls, wall plaster and mosaics were in need of remedial work. The effects of the new cover building and the land-drain laid after the floods could be considered. The walls, mosaics and sub-structure have responded 'organically' to the changes in the environment.

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Volunteers needed urgently please!

The Friends' Volunteers make a unique and much valued contribution to the success of Brading Roman Villa. Excluding the Dig, last year the Friends provided more than 4,000 volunteer hours to the Villa. We are proud to help the Villa enhance the visitor experience and tell the developing story of the site to each new generation.

A lot of behind-the-scenes effort goes into bringing together such an effective volunteer support group, and in maintaining the interest and continued support of our subscribing members.

As a membership charity there are administrative tasks we need to do. An extraordinary combination of factors has depleted our admin team resulting in a very heavy burden being placed on too few people. It is a serious issue which demands urgent action for The Friends to continue our support for the Villa and be a thriving organisation.

Right now we need additional volunteer ADMINISTRATORS

Some IT and organising ability would be appreciated
With good communication skills, some tasks can be done from home
Take on as much or as little as you feel you can.

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY	knowledge of Access/Excel would help
TREASURER	knowledge of Access/Excel would help
PRODUCTION TEAM, NUNTIUS	bi-annual, DTP, compile, print, mail-out
MINUTE TAKER	2-hour meetings, once a month
VOLUNTEERS CO-ORDINATOR	pass news/messages to volunteers
ORGANISER, WINTER LECTURES	arrange dates, speakers, notices etc.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ~ *phone* 07583 142 133
or email friendsofbradingromanvilla@btinternet.com

or leave a message with one of the guides
in the Museum and we'll be in touch.

The drying out has also caused efflorescence of soluble salts; many of us have noticed the powdery residue. There was also concern that the



remaining wall plaster might shrink and detach; sheets of cloth have for some time been lying below some of the plaster to catch any evidence of flaking. The dust raised by three years of archaeology has added to the normal accumulation of dust and cobwebs. Many of us have been aware of the loss of visible detail in the mosaics.

As Paul and his assistants set to work, guides and visitors were fascinated by the intricacy of the task and the immediacy of the effects. Dust, cobwebs etc were gently removed with a museum vacuum cleaner and paint brushes. The mosaics were then damp cleaned with tap water and sponges and patted dry with absorbent paper. The aim was to remove surface deposit without over-wetting, as that would draw more moisture up. Distilled water was not used as that would dissolve some of the trace elements and remove the deposit too quickly. The work was painstaking and physically very demanding, especially on the knees. Use of Youngmans boards reduced pressure on the mosaics to a minimum. Concentration was intense as it could be easy to cause permanent damage; it was for example necessary to observe how the different materials of the tesserae responded.



As one of the privileged group allowed to ‘get up close and personal’ to the mosaics, Paul is infectiously enthusiastic about the quality of the workmanship of the surfaces and the foundations. A testament to this is that the floods washed away substantial sections of the ‘four seasons’ substructure yet the surface, albeit fragile, has survived remarkably well.

Response from the guides who spend so much time with these works of art range from the scientific and practical to the emotional and awed. Seeing the clarity and vibrancy of the images when freshly washed brought out detail of shading and design; red and green were more clearly defined. Medusa’s head in Perseus’ hand, the folds in clothing, the ‘six packs’ on the male torsos, the spine of the maiden in the summer scene – these are just some of the details that brought the images to life. The additional lighting was a bonus.

Words such as ‘privilege’ used by those cleaning the mosaics, Paul’s emotional commitment, the response of visitors who have seen the changes – yet again we are reminded of the valuable role we play in helping to preserve and share this special resource.

Helen Jackson, Museum Guide

Building stones at Brading Roman Villa

Earlier this year, Dr. Andrew Gale, Professor of Geology at Portsmouth University, gave us an excellent talk on Geology, particularly relating to Brading Roman Villa where he is conducting a survey. The information he gave during the lecture answered a great number of questions usually asked by visitors to the museum and in the course of his very enthusiastic study at the Villa, Andy found samples of a variety of building materials, some of which had not been previously identified. He prepared these notes for the Friends’ Museum Guides and we reproduce a précis of them here:

The geological level and age, and to some extent the original location of part of the Brading Villa building material has been determined by visual inspection. Reliance upon two locally sourced freestones is clear; the Bembridge Limestone and a Holocene tufa. The former was probably quarried in Brading itself, and the tufa upon the scarp slope of the chalk downs at an unknown, probably local, site. Other important locally sourced materials are chalk and flints from Brading Down (mostly used for wall infill), and beach-worn boulders of Bembridge Limestone collected from the shore between Bembridge and St Helens (interior walls). The paucity of material derived from the beaches of Sandown Bay is very surprising. Two further Island building stones were used sparingly for ornamental and perhaps ceremonial purposes; a fragment of colonnade is made of Ventnor Stone, and two large, roughly hewn blocks of Binstead Stone were used as part of the altar construction. These records are interesting because they demonstrate that the Romans had discovered these important building materials which became widely exploited from the Middle Ages onwards. The only significant imported material is roofing stone, 95% of which is derived from the Upper Purbeck Limestones, and was quarried in the Swanage district and then imported by sea. The black tesserae in mosaics are pieces of the Blackstone from the Kimmeridge Clay of Purbeck.

1) Roofing stones

a) Purbeck Limestone. Approximately 95% of these are of fissile, shelly Purbeck Limestone from the east Dorset coast, identifiable from the Upper Purbeck (Corbula Beds, Upper Building Stones, and two pieces of low-grade Purbeck Marble). These can be matched precisely using fossil content and grain characters with individual beds outcropping to the west of Swanage. The material has been specifically quarried rather than beach collected. A single boulder is probably a beach clast of Portland Limestone from Dorset.

b) Local Solent Group sandstones. The remaining <5% are thinly bedded fine siltstones and sandstones derived from either the Headon Hill or Bembridge Marl Formations of the eastern Isle of Wight, probably between Whitecliff and St Helen's. They contain external moulds of the distinctive gastropod *Galba* and were probably beach collected.

2) Freestones

a) Bembridge Limestone. Surprisingly high quality blocks of this unit were used for corners, evidently cut with saws, and came from a unit not exposed on the coastal outcrops. The poorer material, a fine white-pale grey limestone containing numerous voids provided by the fossil gastropod *Galba*, probably derived from the lower part of the limestone in the area adjacent to Quay Lane, Brading, where an ancient quarry is situated.

b) Holocene tufa. This rather porous limestone cuts easily with saws, and was evidently widely used in construction. The precise source is problematic, because the only described Island occurrence was high in the cliff at Totland Bay (now long eroded away), and in any case was never sufficiently hard to provide stone. A possible source near Ventnor is being investigated.

3) Infill and rough wall materials

a) Chalk and flints, presumably sourced from Brading Down.

Abundant field-collected and some fresh flints, derived from shallow chalk quarrying probably on Brading Down. The hard chalk is widely used as a filler.

b) Beach collected boulders from Yaverland-Redcliff-Culver.

Includes 3 pieces of ferruginous, red-brown sandstone, one of which comes from the Vectis Formation immediately above the Barnes High Sandstone (distinctive coarse sand grains), and a single piece of the 3rd shell bed limestone layer from the upper Vectis Formation. A single

beach-worn boulder of glauconitic sandstone from the Upper Greensand at Culver Cliff is present, as are a few slabs of fine sandstone from the Wealden Group in Sandown Bay. This material is surprisingly rarely found, given the proximity and abundance of material on this coast.

c) Bembridge-St.Helens, beach collected boulders.

Rounded clasts of Bembridge Limestone, used extensively for some interior walls in main Villa.

4) Ornamental stones

a) Fragmentary colonnade of cut Ventnor Stone (highly distinctive glauconitic sandstone containing brown phosphatic pebbles and white-lined burrows), indicating that this thin (<1metre thick) unit had been discovered, but was evidently not used elsewhere on the site.

b) Two rectangular, rough-hewn blocks of Binstead Stone (highly distinctive lithology, full of voids after comminuted shell fragments), from the environs of the famous Royal Quarry in Binstead. Their apparent use in the construction of an altar is interesting. Evidently this stone was treated as something special.

c) The black tesserae in the mosaics are pieces of the Blackstone from the Kimmeridge Clay of Purbeck, Dorset. The highly distinctive laminated oil shale lithology permits easy identification of this material. It was widely used in the Iron Age for ornaments, so would have been known to locals. The source of the grey tesserae remains to be determined.

Prof Andrew Gale BSc PhD FGS

Information for Guides at Brading Roman Villa: March 2011

Saturday 26th November 2011

11am to 3pm

Come and try your hand at

DOWSING

The lecturer will be DONALD BRYAN Archaeological
Director of The British Society of Dowsers

£15 per person

Numbers will be limited - please book early

Villa Reception 01983 406223
or email bradingeducation@hotmail.co.uk

Catch 22

Over this past year Brading Roman Villa has been working alongside Catch 22, a charity which works with young people and others who find themselves in seemingly impossible situations. and the Isle of Wight Youth offending team. From these organisations groups of supported young people, all aged under 18, came to the villa during August to do various jobs about the building and grounds.

Who can fail to miss the weeded footpaths, the gleaming windows and freshly washed patio tables and chairs on the Café veranda? All the glass and cabinets in the museum have been cleaned and many cobwebs banished away.

There were a few problems at the start, but the young people responded to the warm welcoming atmosphere at the Villa and have worked hard (maybe not always with smiles at the start). Many weeds have been pulled and new relationships with laughter have been forged.

It is hoped to continue the good work already started and move forward in support of these young people in their difficult times.

Joy Cleightonhills

Winter Workshops at Brading Roman Villa

GRANDPARENTS AND GRANDCHILDREN CRAFT DAYS

Spend some quality time with your grandchildren

Saturday, 22nd October 2011
11am to 3pm

come and join us making mosaics
(no experience necessary)

Learn basic mosaic cutting skills
making scary Hallowe'en coasters
(£2.50 each) and trivets (£3.00 each).

Saturday, 17th December 2011
11am to 2pm

we will be making Christmas
presents using the art of mosaics.

From £2.50 up to £7.00
to make an individual handmade
mosaic of your choice.

For more information or to make a booking please telephone
Villa Reception 01983 406223
or email bradingeducation@hotmail.co.uk

Ψ Winter Workshops

at Brading Roman Villa

ROMAN HISTORY HOMEWORK SESSIONS

**Saturday 29th October &
Sunday 30th October
10am to 3pm**

Are your children learning about
Romans at school this term?

Need help with their homework?

No ideas for their project?

Why not learn together at
Brading Roman Villa?

Join us at Brading Roman Villa for
different workshops where you and
your children can either

- make a mosaic using glass tiles or felt
- paint a wooden shield in a Roman style
- make a pair of Roman style shoes
- learn how to write in Latin, or
- learn about Roman cookery

*There will a charge for some
of these workshops*

**FREE CHILD ENTRY
FOR EVERY ADULT ADMISSION
INTO THE MUSEUM TO SEE
A REAL ROMAN VILLA**

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT
THE WINTER WORKSHOPS
OR TO MAKE A BOOKING

PLEASE TELEPHONE
VILLA RECEPTION

01983 406223

OR EMAIL

bradingeducation@hotmail.co.uk

**Saturday 5th November 2011
10.30am to 3pm**

Come and try your hand at

NATURAL DYEING

The lecturers will be

Sue and Jacky

of

Isle of Wight Spinners

This Island-based group spins, dyes
and weaves using traditional methods.

Come and learn the skills to make a

WICKER BASKET OR TRAY

on **Saturday, 12th November 2011**

10 am to 3 pm

your tutor will be **TIM JOHNSTON**, an
Island artist who works with hazel and
willow to create sculptures and spaces
as education resources

£15 per person
to cover cost of materials

Ψinter Lectures at Brading Roman Villa

Saturday, October 15th
2.30pm

INFAMOUS WOMEN

Women in Isle of Wight history whose notoriety extended far beyond the Island's shores.

Speaker: **Adrian Searle**

Saturday, November 19th
2.30pm

PLUTO

Pipeline Under The Ocean
The best kept secret of the War.
A new film and talk

Speaker: **Robin Maconchy**

Saturday, December 10th
2.30pm

THE ISLE OF WIGHT IN 1879

A momentous year - what did the first Dig at Brading tell us about the Island in 1879?

Speaker: **Richard Smout**, Co. Archivist

Saturday, January 14th
2.30pm

THAT SINKING FEELING

The loss of HMS Royal George in 1782

Speaker: **Roger Whitby-Smith**

Saturday, February 18th
2.30pm

NORSE/VIKING MYTHOLOGY

An illustrated talk on Norse/Viking Myth and Religion: Deities, Magic, War, Witchcraft, and Ship Burials.

Speaker: **Alan Phillips**

Saturday, March 17th
2.30pm



MOSAICS - THE BROADER PICTURE

An illustrated talk on the meaning and inspiration for the mosaics at Brading, and to consider who laid them.

Speaker: **Stephen Cosh**

Friends' Ticket price £10

Limited seating in the Garfield Weston Room. Admission by ticket only, sold on a first come, first served basis.

ADVANCE PAYMENT IS ESSENTIAL TO RESERVE A SEAT

Unless otherwise stated, ticket price £5, including Tea/Coffee & biscuits children & students £4

Friends' ticket price £4, Stephen Cosh Lecture £10

Box Office telephones: **0758 3142 133** or **01983 611298**

Cash or cheques only, please, to FBRV.

MEMBER OF THE FRIENDS SEASON TICKET £25 TO RESERVE A SEAT FOR ALL 6 LECTURES



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