

Brading Roman Villa



Construction site viewed from the South

Photo: Noel Stimson

By the time this newsletter goes to press, it will only be a matter of few weeks or so before the Villa re-opens. The sedum roof is being put on, and despite the scaffolding, the new cover building blends well into the landscape. We are looking forward with much excitement to Opening Day and, of course, the special Friends' Preview Day.

I am very pleased to say that as interest in the Villa's re-opening increases, so does our membership. You must all be talking to your friends about joining - thank you, and please keep it up!

A lot of people have said they would like to take a more active part in the day-to-day running of the Villa as well as fund-raising events. So we are compiling a list of contact numbers for volunteers who are willing to help either in times of crisis or when a particular project or event is planned. We really would appreciate your help so please telephone the Villa if you would like your name added to the list.

Saving Brading's unique mosaics has been such a worthwhile cause. Your contribution has been invaluable, but we now need to increase our membership and, vitally, to enlist volunteers. The more Friends we have, the better able we are to support the Villa and ensure its future as the jewel in the Island's crown.

Chairman of the Friends of Brading Roman Villa

In this issue:

CHAIRMAN'S LETTER Wendy Gannon	page 1
VILLA NATTER Neville Carr	page 2
THE MUSEUM DISPLAY David Low	page 3
VILLA NEWS	page 4

Villa Natter

by Neville Carr

Since the success of the first Friends' newsletter, events have been moving at a pace here at the Villa. The old building has ceased to exist except for the lowest level which forms part of the 'crash-deck' protecting the walls and mosaics. Time has really flown for the new structure - classroom, cafeteria, visitor centre and main building are all at full height, decked roofing in place, and the walls are being clad in ply-board preparatory to the cedar exterior going on. The weather has remained extremely favourable and the site is dry at the moment. It looks as if the completion will be on time and we will be in business again by the end of July.

The run-up to the opening will be very busy. Staff have to be recruited; stock for the shop purchased, priced and put out on display. The outside grassed areas need to be tidied up, and new signs placed to guide visitors from the car park to the new entrance - and a host of other things.

The amphitheatre, built from the earth dug out of the footings, is well-shaped and will be seeded shortly. This will make outside events, small concerts, 'Living History' weeks for schools, etc. even more exciting.

Getting the advertising right is so important. Certainly all our local media are interested and, indeed, we are very fortunate that there are stories to tell here. *Palladius* and *Allectus* are key characters. *Palladius*, our man from Antioch, will form part of the new exhibition because he is linked to the mosaics. In *Allectus* we have a piratical tale, one of intrigue and dark doings. Two good stories which are both entertaining and informative.

And, of course, there's always the ghost. Over the years, it was well reported that a male figure, dressed in a shepherd's smock, would come through the north wall by the north-west corner. The old walkway ran past the spot and quite often dogs, when they were permitted inside the Villa, would refuse to pass the place where the apparition was supposed to emerge. Visitors who said they were psychically receptive often told the staff that in just that area the Villa felt 'cold' and unwelcoming - some could even hear screams and other noises of an unpleasant nature.

We do know that the far corner of Room 12 and Room 11 may have had unnatural human deaths in them. I've spent a lot of time in that old building, sometimes quite late at night, but I can't claim to have felt anything unpleasant or spooky, but then I can't claim to be psychic either. It's all very odd. We shall have to wait and see if our new building will provide a home for the old boy.



LETTER TO THE EDITOR:

Dear Dr. Stimson,
I am delighted with the newsletter "Nuntius", and wish you all the best with your editorship. However, I have one suggestion to make; when drawings or illustrations appear could they be marked with North, South, East & West? We on the Island know, but those further afield may not. This also applies to the lovely little model in a glass case in the museum itself.

It is wonderful to know that at last work is going ahead to protect and display this wonderful piece of Island history.

Yours very sincerely,

Marie Langford.

Thank you for your letter and very appropriate suggestion - Editor

The Museum Display

by David Low

The emphasis from the early days of planning the new development has been on preserving the Villa and putting it on display in a really attractive environment.

The exciting progress shows us how close to achievement this is. The task was then to interpret the Villa to the public and give them a good experience of it. And lastly, to put on display artefacts from the Villa, illustrating the activities of those who lived there.

The budget for the Displays was always very tight. Our Museum Designer Mike Whalley reckoned it was a quarter of what was necessary! He, having completed the designs has now stepped aside, believing that we can get far more for the available funds than he could. We have had to take hard decisions in choosing which aspects to pursue and we have been left with an enormous amount of work!

In general we have held to top-quality manufacturers, because what we present must be brilliant and durable. But it means we can't do everything we had hoped. Some of the presentation of artefacts on the museum side of the displays will have to be held over to a later date, when we hope to be eligible for further grants. This decision has, in good part, been driven by the considerable volume of archaeological finds from the excavations of the last few months. Much of that material is now in the hands of specialists, being assessed and conserved. New understandings of life at the Villa are still emerging and we would be over-hasty if we tried to have it all ready for opening in late July. As it is, we have a tremendous programme to get through by then and it is a considerable worry that aspects of what we can achieve will not be ready by that vital date.

As the months progress David Tomalin, Kevin Trott and I will need increasing amounts of help. I would be particularly grateful for anyone with woodworking skills. We have plenty of timber from the old handrails and kick-boards, which, you may remember were in beautiful condition. We are going to have to make them into plinths for the plough replica, tile displays and so forth.

Do any of you know a young person, student or whatever, who might be interested in becoming involved in helping getting the displays ready in late June and July? Please could they get in touch with me and I'll tell them what is involved. Or, what about you? Could you help with the general preparation on any of the days in that period? My telephone is 874306.

Meanwhile we will soon be wanting to lay out a matching garden to the one we already have. It will give a balance opposite the drum tower. This will need a lot of "Box" (Buxus) hedging. Could you please pot up "box" cuttings. We'll let you know when we need them. Yes, we are going to make a real effort to keep out the rabbits!



VOLUNTEER GARDENERS!

help us to create a Roman garden!



GREEN FINGERS

needed to pot up lots of cuttings of

BOX HEDGE CUTTINGS

now ready for transplanting to the new Roman Garden.

A GARDENER'S TROWEL

Do you have a gardener's trowel to spare which looks old enough to be included in a Victorian display?

Do you have WOOD-WORKING SKILLS?

We need to make plinths for the plough replica, tile displays etc.

LABELLING & DISPLAY CASES

In late June/July could you help with preparing the display cases?

**DO
PLEASE
RECRUIT
A FRIEND!**

*More information
about all the above
from:*

**The Friends of
the Villa
01983 406223**

VILLA NEWS

BafM

The Friends of Brading Roman Villa are now Members of the British Association of Friends of Museums, an organisation that exists to help and advise heritage groups such as ours. An informative newsletter is produced and regional meetings take place through the year. Information exchange between the various museums up and down the country means that through the **BafM** we can benefit from a wealth of first hand experience and guidance.

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The New Building

On 6th May, The Friends held another meeting to report on progress at the Villa, this time at Ryde Theatre. Melvyn Dennett and Tony Maine have continued their almost weekly filming at the site, and showed an excellent video of the various stages of construction – from demolition of the old building right up to date.

It is an amazing building and Henry Murray Smith of the Architects, Rainey Petrie Johns, spoke about some of the problems encountered in designing a building whose purpose is primarily to preserve the mosaics, but at the same time to create a dynamic, modern exhibition centre. Kevin Trott continued the story from the archaeological point of view and Neville Carr, Curator, closed the meeting with an encouraging glimpse of what the future may hold for the Villa and the important piece of our heritage that we have all helped to preserve.

* * *

Calling All Gardeners!

Originally, there may well have been a garden in front of the villa. A wealthy man built the house and it would not be unexpected that he should also have created a garden in the familiar fashion of his Mediterranean home.

We already have an established planting which is now slightly off-centre to the new building so another, similar sized garden is needed to give balance to the area. It would be good if this garden could be an accurate representation of what may have originally existed.

At the moment, our Gardening Sub-Committee is researching the plants which may have been indigenous to the area in the 4th Century, or which may have been brought in from Rome. We hope that Kevin Trott's soil and pollen analysis will confirm our research.

I visited Fishbourne Palace to see the garden they created, which we know was thoroughly researched. I spent a long time there in the middle of their busy day, so I owe a debt of gratitude to David Rudkin and Suzanne Evans for their invaluable advice and enthusiastic encouragement.

We plan to start work as soon as we can. One of our Friends, who is a landscape architect, will be helping and we hope other green-fingered volunteers will join us.

WG

Your Committee:

Chairman: Wendy Gannon
Vice Chairman: Martin Boswell
Treasurer: Michael Jennings
Newsletter Editor: Noel Stimson

Committee: Daniel Lamb,
Sam Twining,
Janet Whitby-Smith,
Roger Whitby-Smith.

Ex-officio: Neville Carr (Curator and General Manager), Rosemary Cowan, Rosemary Cooper.

(All contact can be made initially via the Villa: 01983 406223 or by email: info@bradingromanvilla.org.uk)