*Ewan Coopey muses about ways Roman archaeological and historical research can intersect with public and applied history in Australia.*

# Public Roman Archaeology Down Under

Roman archaeology is offered in several institutions across Australia and Aoteoroa (New Zealand), from the [University of Western Australia](https://www.uwa.edu.au/schools/humanities/classics-and-ancient-history) to [Otago University](https://www.otago.ac.nz/classics/index.html), typically as a component of history and/or archaeology degrees. There are also a large number of projects and a sizeable contingent of active researchers in the field, many of whom are members of the [Mediterranean Archaeology Australasian Research Community](https://mediterraneanarcha.wixsite.com/maarc)and/or the [Australasian Society for Classical Studies](https://www.ascs.org.au/).

As an assistant at the [Centre for Applied History](https://www.mq.edu.au/research/research-centres-groups-and-facilities/resilient-societies/centres/centre-for-applied-history) *and* a Roman archaeologist ([a label I am still learning to embrace](https://archaeohumanities.substack.com/p/about-the-author-researcher-identity)) at Macquarie University on the lands of the Wallamattagal people I am always looking for ways to collaborate with community and facilitate public engagement with Roman archaeology in Australia. Indeed, I agree with Karen Milek, that archaeologists “have an ethical obligation to improve the accessibility and portability of archaeological science in order to enable citizen science” — to which I would add public history and archaeology. To achieve this, open and public participation, publication, and outreach elements of research need to become embedded within research, “not an addendum relegated to ‘impact statements, ’open days’ or ‘public engagement events’” ([Milek 2018: 41, 43](https://doi.org/10.1080/00293652.2018.1552312)). This is not to say these other components are not still highly valuable pieces of the puzzle, just that they should not be the sole forms of public engagement activities, after which researches dust off their hands and say ‘job done’.

Naturally, the field already does a great deal of quality community engagement and collaboration. Historians and archaeologists consult on new curricula, provide or organise public lectures, and [appear on radio](https://www.abc.net.au/radio/programs/nightlife/the-battle-of-the-tuetoborg-forest/10213198). A particularly exciting event last year, hosted by the Chau Chak Wing Museum and [Wayward brewing](https://www.wayward.com.au/), saw US-based Professor Sarah E Bond hold [a virtual talk on ancient and mediaeval brewing](https://www.sydney.edu.au/museum/whats-on/talks-and-events/early-medieval-beer-and-brewers.html).

# Open Access, Publication, and Data

However, the incorporation of more open access (OA) practices into our research methodologies, most notably OA publishing and (where circumstances permit) open data, remains under-explored. OA outputs do of course exist, including public facing web articles (such as this [Lighthouse article](https://lighthouse.mq.edu.au/article/february-2021/What-was-it-like-to-be-old-in-ancient-Rome)) and openly accessible academic journal articles (such as this [Worthing et. al. 2020](https://publons.com/publon/10.10.1111/arcm.12570) study of pollution at Pompeii). That said, much more could be made freely available. Uploading pre-prints to fully open repositories such as [Zenodo](https://zenodo.org/) could be particularly impactful here. This would make these papers completely free-to-use, help deliver academic research to the public, and circumvent the sometimes ridiculously expensive APCs for OA articles ([Marwick 2020](https://doi.org/10.1080/00293652.2020.1837233)). Indeed, I think some researchers would be pleasantly surprised about [some publishers’ policies regarding open archiving of pre-prints and even published versions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Copyright_policies_of_academic_publishers).

Open archaeological data — ‘archaeological data published in a free an accessible online format’ — is another realm of potential. With more Roman archaeological data made openly accessible, people could interact and engage with Roman material — the collation of which they likely inadvertently funded — for free, and at their own pace. This also has pedagogical and accessibility benefits, allowing students to develop their skills with ‘real’ archaeological data and reducing physical, logistical, and financial barriers for enthusiasts, students, HDRs, and ECRs alike ([Garstki 2022: 3](https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0vh9t9jq)). Further down the track, community events where research data is presented, engaged with, manipulated, and even produced, could be developed and presented as integral pieces of major archaeological research projects. Th UK-based [Arch-I-Scan](https://archiscannews.com/2023/01/10/arch-i-scans-2022-in-review/) project has seen great success in this realm, using community volunteers and holding public colloquia.

There are of course challenges. For one, artefacts and analyses must be produced in ways which the public can engage with and channels must exist to advertise these resources. Archaeological data can also sometimes require computer skills to properly ‘use’. Nevertheless, OA tables, visualisations, maps, images, and other outputs are a good start (See this [Internet Archaeology volume](https://intarch.ac.uk/journal/issue24/5/tof.html) for example). Also, there are data publishing services which use, or are developing, relatively user friendly interfaces with drop down menus (such as [Open Context](https://opencontext.org/) *and* [Archaeology Data Services](https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/)). Also, whilst image rights always throw up issues, something as simple as a link to another open source website which does have image rights can be more than enough. This is what Brian Ballsun-Stanton and myself tried to do with our recent contribution to [Open Context](https://opencontext.org/subjects/688fdbab-af4d-43a1-b226-f033a07074d2) for instance. Finally, there are a great range of institutional and cultural barriers related to outdated views on data-sharing, publishing, and even the purpose(s) of academic research, but those are for another blog…

That said, nothing is ever easy, and I think increased engagement with OA practices can help Australasian-based archaeologists and historians of the Roman world facilitate engagement beyond, or following, the ‘open days’ and ‘public engagement events’ mentioned above. It would allow interested communities to engage with knowledge production however and whenever they wish, and I for one cannot wait to hear what questions they ask.

# Further reading List

Garstki, K. (2022) ‘Introduction: Challenges of a Critical Archaeology in the Modern World’, in Garstki, K. (ed.) *Critical archaeology in the digital age*, UCLA Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Press (Cotsen digital archaeology series). <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0vh9t9jq>.

Hillard, Tom. W.. Ancient history in a modern university: proceedings of a conference held at Macquarie University, 8-13 July, 1993: to mark twenty-five years of the teaching of ancient history at Macquarie University and the retirement from the chair of professor Edwin Judge. <https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/530778>.

Marwick, Ben. 2020. ‘Open Access to Publications to Expand Participation in Archaeology’. Norwegian Archaeological Review 53 (2): 163–69. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00293652.2020.1837233>.