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

# Roman Archaeology in Australia…

Roman archaeology in Australasia — how to apply in Aussie context?

Roman history and archaeology is practised in several institutions across Australia and Aoteoroa.

…looking for more avenues to engage with community and contribute towards the consumption of Roman archaeology and history by the general populace.

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 components of practices, “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){:target=“\_blank”}). This is not to say these three components are not still highly valuable pieces of the puzzle, just that they should not be the sole domains of public and community engagement, after which researches dust off their hands and go ‘job done’.

Naturally, the field already does a great deal of quality community engagement. 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){:target=“\_blank”}. A particularly exciting even last year, hosted by Chau Chak Wing Museum and Wayward brewing, saw US-based Professor Sarah E Bond hold [a virtual talk on ancient and medieveal brewing](https://www.sydney.edu.au/museum/whats-on/talks-and-events/early-medieval-beer-and-brewers.html){:target=“\_blank”}.

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

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 collection 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 or financial barriers for enthusiasts, students, HDRs and ECRs alike ([Garstki 2022: 3](https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0vh9t9jq){:target=“\_blank”}).

There are of course challenges. For one, artefacts and analyses must be produced in ways where they can be engaged with by the public and channels must exist to advertise these resources. Archaeological data can also sometimes require computer skills to properly ‘use’ — but OA tables, visualisations, maps, images, and other outputs produced by analyses of the data are a good start (See this [Internet Archaeology volume](https://intarch.ac.uk/journal/issue24/5/tof.html){:target=“\_blank”} for example). Also, there are data publishing services which use or are developing relatively user friendly interfaces with drop down menus (Open Context and *ADS*). 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 I tried to do with my recent contribution to [Open Context](https://opencontext.org/subjects/688fdbab-af4d-43a1-b226-f033a07074d2){:target=“\_blank”}. 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 that is 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 communities to engage with knowledge production however and whenever they wish — and I for one cannot wait to hear what questions they ask.

# Reading List

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>{:target=“\_blank”}.

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>{:target=“\_blank”}.

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>{:target=“\_blank”}.