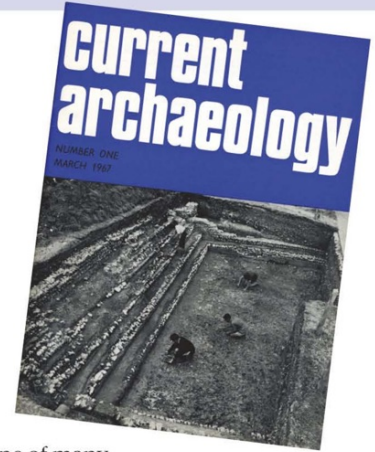




Excavating the CA archive

Joe Flatman explores half a century of reports from the past.



Continuing our series exploring how *Current Archaeology* has reported on different historical eras, this latest column features the Roman period. Sadly, just as last month's offering was dedicated to the memory of Geoff Wainwright, this missive pays tribute to a giant of British archaeology who recently passed away: the Romanist Dai Morgan Evans. Like his fellow Welshman Geoff (and often in partnership with him), Dai devoted his life to archaeology, and was a tireless campaigner for and proponent of it.

In previous excavations of the CA archive, I have already sifted through the reporting of Hadrian's Wall over the years (see CA 326), but here I will look at a wider range of Roman sites across the country. Roman archaeology has been a consistently popular topic among CA's readers: the wealth of sites across Britain, their regular discovery by both 'rescue' and 'research' archaeologists, and their often substantial survival all make for exciting sites to dig and also to read about. Hence, CA 1 in March 1967 had the Gadebridge Roman Villa in Hemel Hempstead as the first ever 'cover star'. This site was under exploration following its accidental discovery during road-building, and CA 18 (January 1970) provided an update on the investigation. Happily, the original excavator David Neal returned to the site in 2000 to undertake additional work.

THE ROMANS ARRIVE

The magazine's first report on a 'great Roman site' came in CA 6 (January 1968), with an article on Fishbourne villa: one of the best-known British sites of this period, and a perennial favourite for visitors to Sussex, with a well-maintained museum run by the Sussex Archaeological Society. The site (whose grandiose entrance hall was depicted on the cover in a reconstruction by Nigel Sunter)

had been discovered in 1960 during pipe-laying, and was one of many excavated by that tireless archaeological polymath Barry (since 2006, Sir Barry) Cunliffe. CA 187 (August 2003) and 217 (April 2008) returned to Fishbourne, and it is fascinating to track the changing perspectives on the site in the context of wider developments in Roman archaeology through these articles. Meanwhile, Cunliffe was back in action in CA 10 (September 1968), this time leading the exploration of Roman Bath, completing the work begun there by Sir Ian Richmond, who had died in 1964.

CA's reporting on Roman archaeology went quiet for a while in the mid-1970s, but came back with a bang in CA 62 (June 1978), dedicating an entire volume to the subject. Featured sites included the then-ongoing work at Usk legionary fortress, as well as the Iron Age and Romano-British temple site at Hayling Island, alongside updates on sites as widely spread as Canterbury in the south and the Antonine Wall in the north.

It was a very different type of Roman site that appeared

in CA 66 (April 1979), which saw an in-depth report from Gustav and Chrissie Milne on excavations along the line of the former waterfront by the Museum of London's Department of Urban Archaeology (the organisation that in time evolved into MOLA, modern-day excavator of many sites both in London and further afield). They had uncovered a series of waterlogged and well-preserved timbers during the mid-1970s construction boom in the City of London. In Gustav Milne in particular, British archaeology has been lucky to find itself a dogged and dedicated champion for such sites: Gustav, as many readers know, is still happily at work along the river over 40 years later, most recently leading the Thames Discovery Programme and its national offshoot CITIZAN.

BELOW In 1978, an entire issue of the magazine (CA 62) was dedicated to Roman archaeology. The Iron Age and Romano-British temple site at Hayling Island is just one of the excavations explored.

