

Jessica Dowdell – Roman Society Museum Internship Bursary Report

Through the Roman Society UK Museum Internship bursary I had the opportunity to participate in a placement with the Manchester Museum. During my time at the Museum I developed a report, which evaluated the awareness, accessibility, and content of the Ancient Worlds mobile site.

The development of the galleries and the mobile site in 2012, aimed to make the archeology and Egyptian collections held by the Museum more accessible and relevant to visitors. The site and exhibition took into account what museum audiences were interested in, how they interacted with objects, and made provisions for different levels of knowledge.

Through this project I had the opportunity to work with Bryan Sitch, curator of archaeology as well as a number of other staff members from the curatorial, information technology, public programs and marketing teams. Through my investigation of the content and accessibility problems within the Ancient Worlds mobile site, I was able to gain an insight into the difficulties of implementing a digital media project, which meets the needs of both visitors and staff.

The content included in the site aimed to extend the knowledge of visitors within the gallery space, beyond what could be gained through the traditional museum experience. This was achieved through the use of videos, images, 3D scans and additional text. A number of the content pages stood out as excellent examples of the use of digital media. These included content for the Manchester Roman words square, the Worsley Man facial reconstruction and an Egyptian Fayum portrait of a Roman soldier. Details of each of these sections have been included below as examples of the research conducted.

Roman Word Square:

The content included in the Roman word square link is of a high quality and includes text, images and a video. The image allows the visitor a detailed view of the object, which cannot be attained through viewing the object in the case. The video includes an interview with Craig Brisbane, an archeology enthusiast who was involved in the excavation of the object, as well as images and a short animation. The animation, which moves the letters on the square to spell out *Pater Noster*, reveals the meaning of the object in a clear concise manner. This animation is an excellent use of digital technology. Not only does it extend the visitors knowledge of the object but it also reinforces the knowledge previously given on the text panel, site and video.

Worsley Man:

The audio track included with the Worsley Man panel gives visitors an insight into the process of discovery and reconstruction. The audio track discusses the initial discovery of the head west of Manchester in 1950, police and archaeology investigations, and current scientific methods. The track questions current historical theories concerning his death and possible causes for his injuries. The audio links Manchester city to the object and makes connections to a well know similar example. Through these connections the audio track presents the information within a

framework that will be understood by audiences. The mobile site page linked to the Worsley man reconstruction successfully extends visitors knowledge of the object and allows engagement beyond a traditional museum experience.

Egyptian Fayum Portrait of a Roman soldier:

When entering the Egyptian portrait gallery the first object on display is a portrait of a Roman soldier. The portrait dated between 98- 138 AD is accompanied by a mobile site page, which features an audio track presented by Campbell Price, curator of Egypt and Sudan. The audio track contextualizes the object within the museum collection and establishes a connection to Flinders Petrie. Through the discussion of its creation and historical purpose the track successfully creates a person from an object. The person is then connected to the modern world through exhibition details and a story featuring Oscar Wilde.

This experience has allowed me to gain an insight into the development of digital media within a museum environment. I have developed a better understanding of how to effectively communicate the ancient past through digital mediums. This will be invaluable for my continuing work at the University of Queensland and completion of my Masters thesis during 2014. I would like to thank both the Roman Society and the Manchester Museum for this opportunity.