

Spectacle and Display: A Modern History of Britain's Roman Mosaic Pavements

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Front cover image: Mosaic art or craft? Reading Museum, wall hung mosaic floor from House 1, Insula XIV, Silchester, juxtaposed with pottery by the Aldermaston potter Alan Gaiger-Smith.

Back cover image: Mosaic as spectacle. Verulamium Museum, 2007. The triclinium pavement, wall mounted and studio lit for effect, Insula II, Building 1 in Verulamium 2007.

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Preface

My interest in the preservation and display of Roman period mosaics originated with a landowner's desire to avoid prosecution for damaging a Scheduled Ancient Monument. The proposal involved the re-exposure, and display beneath a cover building of a mosaic in Northamptonshire. It raised a series of somewhat awkward questions. How should the mosaic be displayed? What was the historic context of display? Only a few short reviews have touched on the subject. With no established history against which to pitch a revisionist interpretation this book was conceived as an attempt to understand the progression of mosaic first preserved in the 16th century and used as a symbol of betrayal to their present day role as signifiers of professional expertise and of a distant, but complex and compelling culture.

In current narratives of preservation and antiquarianism, although littered with spectacular discoveries, mosaics have played only a limited role. Their early interpretation as military luxuries or extraordinary symbols of Roman military excess and their all too frequent destruction once discovered has clouded their contribution to the conservation debate. Consequently this book is the first to generate a critical narrative history of the preservation and display of Roman period mosaics in Britain.

Examining changing attitudes to mosaics and their preservation, has meant looking at the motivations and ideas behind preservation and display. For many pavements the records of discovery and their subsequent preservation are set out in letters and brief published accounts, later the evidence of illustration, guidebooks, excavation reports and more general accounts reveal the complex motivations which have inspired both preservation and display. In more recent times audio tours and websites have begun to replace traditional print media as museums, collections, the educational establishment and regulatory authorities compete for audience and resources.

This book is intended to be of interest to those interested in the display of antiquities, their conservation (in the widest sense) as well as their role in the continuing heritage debate, museology, recreation and tourism. It touches on the relationship between architecture and the in situ monument and although several papers have examined the effectiveness of structures in terms of conservation standards the effect of building design on perceptions of the antiquities they protect has received little attention.

Acknowledgements

The research presented in this book began with a DPhil thesis at Oxford University, Department of Continuing Education and continued to the present day. It was informed and inspired by my experience as a senior Heritage Consultant, at first as a Director at CgMs and later as a Director of Heritage at RPS Heritage (RPS Consulting UK & Ireland).

The inspiration for the book derives from a conversation with Professors Chris Gosden and Michael Fulford at the completion of my DPhil. At this time it was clear from the evidence I had gathered that, despite passing reference to mosaics and their contribution to understanding the development of Roman Britain, there was no published cultural history of recent/modern attitudes to the historic mosaics. Whilst my DPhil focused on preservation, this narrative is concerned with reception, preservation and display. It spans a period in which mosaics were perceived as politically charged symbols to a time when, amongst other things, they have provided the inspiration for contemporary carpets (Luke Irwin) and urban place-making (Milton Keynes). This is a contested narrative in which spectacle and survival, conservation and fine art, ownership and curation provide the discourse and texts of contemporary attitudes.

A large number of people have given their time and expertise during the preparation of this book to whom I am very grateful for their patience and insights. All text is situated and needless to say I have drawn gratefully on their suggestions and proposals but any errors in the narrative are entirely my responsibility. In particular I would like to thank my research supervisors Professor Gary Locke at Oxford and Dr David Thackray, Chief Archaeological Adviser, National Trust, Martin Henig and Chris Gosden at the Oxford Institute of Archaeology, the curators of Bignor, John Smith, Fishbourne, Robin Symmons and Dave Rudkin, at Chedworth, Phil Bethell and at Littlecote, Bryn Walters and Ian Keele who built the cover building; the manager of Corinium Museum, Simone Clark, the Curator of Hull and East Riding Museum, Paula Gentil, Leicester Jewry Wall Museum, former curator Peter Liddle, members of the Research and Publication Board at Chedworth, in particular Professor Peter Salway, Simon Esmonde-Cleary, Rupert Goulding, Guy Salkeld, Professor Jason Wood, at Stowe, Gary Marshall, at Croughton, Dr Glyn Coppack, English Heritage Inspector of Ancient Monuments, estate manager Ernie Potter, agent Paul Allen at Bidwells; Dr Will Wootton, Dr Stephen Cosh and David Neal at ASPROM, Janet Tatlock, Manchester Univ. In America, Stephen Zwirn and Gudrun Bühl at Dumbarton Oaks, J. Michael Padgett, Curator of Ancient Art at the Princeton University Art Museum and the curatorial staff at Baltimore Museum of Art, who provided an opportunity to see and discuss the display of the Antioch Collection.

Over the years audiences at seminars and presentations at Oxford and Cambridge Universities, ASPROM in London, and in the Veneto have provide important feedback and encouragement.

Lastly this book could not have been written without the support, help and encouragement of my wife Judith whose patience and understanding have supported the often late-night struggles with recalcitrant text and awkward phraseology. Without her this book would not have been written.

Mosaics Make a Site¹

Introduction

At the start of the 21st century, at the culmination of over 30 years work, a four-volume compendium of over 2000 mosaic pavements known from Roman Britain was published by the Society of Antiquaries.² These are such familiar artefacts that they are readily associated with Roman life and the discovery of a new pavement is eagerly reported by the media and professional press alike. ‘Unparalleled’,³ ‘spectacular’,⁴ ‘remarkable’, ‘wonderous’,⁵ are common superlatives, evidence of the fascination at the survival of such visually striking, complex and fragile objects. Yet in 1980 Peter Johnson estimated that some 75% of all known mosaics from Britain have been lost, 10% are known for certain to have been reburied, about 5% are kept in permanent store, while only about 8% are on public display.⁶ Even where a cover building or site museum has been constructed, the result can be destructive. Some mosaics have been lost due to the failure of cover buildings, ‘for every cover building surviving today, at least twice that number have been lost in the past’ wrote Stephen Cosh in 2002.⁷

In Britain mosaics have been recovered and displayed from the 16th century onwards, some exposed in the 18th and 19th centuries were later protected by a variety of structures from the substantial shelters at Chedworth and Bignor to the corrugated-iron shed recently replaced at Brading.⁸ Today mosaics are found in a multiplicity of modern cover buildings, in traditional and contemporary museum displays and remounted as panels in shopping centres and art galleries. Amongst the better known are the pavements at Fishbourne, where mosaics discovered in the 1960s form the largest collection of preserved mosaics in the country and once decorated the west wing of a palace possibly built for Togidubnus, a client king, of the Romans in the 1st century. On the Isle of Wight the villa at Brading⁹ has mosaics displayed beneath an iconic building of the early 21st century. The mosaics date to the 4th century and may have decorated a pagan cult centre whilst those at Newport, also on the Isle of Wight, decorated the bath suite of a rural estate centre and are displayed in a more traditional brick built cover building. Lullingstone, in Kent, is the site of a mosaic in which Bellerophon the winged horse once occupied an apsidal dining room dating to the mid-4th century displayed beneath a steel portal framed structure. Bignor in Sussex has rooms which contain some of the best-known mosaics Britain displayed beneath early 19th century thatched buildings, whilst

¹ Michaelides 2003, *Mosaics Make a Site* was the short pithy title of the Vith International Conference of the International Committee for the Conservation of Mosaics which focused on the contribution mosaics make to the display and conservation of historic sites.

² Cosh and Neal 2005: 2010, Neal and Cosh, 2002: 2009

³ Sawyer P 2016 describing the discovery of the villa and mosaic at Brixton Deverill on 17th April 2016, *Daily Telegraph*

⁴ BBC News 2017, Great Central Street, Leicester

⁵ Boxford History Project 3rd Oct 2018

⁶ Johnson 1980b

⁷ Cosh 2002: 4

⁸ Tomalin 2006

⁹ Tomalin 2006

at Littlecote in Berkshire the villa is well known for its Orpheus pavement displayed beneath a contemporary Scandinavian inspired covered building.

Mosaics can also be seen at the lesser known sites such as North Leigh in Oxfordshire or Kings Weston, a western suburb of Bristol. In the west there are mosaics at Rockbourne, Hampshire, found during the Second World War surviving from the north and west ranges of a large rural villa and now displayed by Hampshire Cultural Trust. At Spoonley Wood (Sudeley Manor), Gloucestershire several mosaics from a large villa remain *in situ* while in Canterbury the Roman Pavement Museum, has a floor with three decorative panels, once part of a large town house on Butchery Row, still in place. Town house mosaics are also known at St Albans, where a large 2nd century pavement of 16 panels, each framing a medallion of stylised flowers, is on display in an early 21st cover building in Verulamium Park. In Dorchester the mosaic at Colliton Park, found in 1937-8, can be viewed under a glass-sided cover building.

In several cases mosaics have been exposed and deliberately reburied to preserve them *in situ*. The most famous of the preserved pavements is Woodchester.¹⁰ It was discovered in the late 17th century, drawn in the early 18th century and more extensively investigated by Samuel Lysons who published the results in 1797. Recently a facsimile of the mosaic by the brothers Robert and Edward Woodward was on display at Prinknash Abbey but has now been sold at auction for some £75,000. One of the more recent examples of reburial is Croughton, Northamptonshire. Here a pavement illustrating Bellerophon slaying the Chimera was discovered in 1991, intended by the landowner to go on display beneath a cover building the pavement is presently preserved under layers of sand and topsoil.¹¹ Other examples are less well known. From Beadlam in Yorkshire to Wynford Eagle in Dorset nearly 30 pavements are recorded as preserved *in situ* by re-burial. The majority are situated in the remains of rural villas with only a small minority remaining from urban buildings like those from the small towns of Great Casterton in Rutland or Folkstone in Kent.

There is no doubt about the popularity of mosaics with the visiting public. Chedworth, owned by the National Trust, regularly attracts some 60,000 visitors a year while the palace at Fishbourne saw over a quarter of a million visitors a year when it first opened. Yet there is also a darker aspect to their discovery. The value of mosaic to the antiquities trade is evident in the potential for theft. Despite their size, mosaics have been stolen from sites throughout the Roman Empire. The location of a large pavement at Croughton, though rural, was close to major transport routes, making theft a possibility. It was also close to a military airbase. In 1948 a mosaic at Brantingham, cleaned in preparation for lifting and display in Hull Museum, was stolen overnight.¹² The suggestion that American servicemen might be complicit in the export of antiquities has been an unproven but recurring conspiracy theory from at least as early as 1946.¹³

The aim of this book is twofold. The first is to explore the way in which changing attitudes to the discovery of mosaics has contributed to the evolution and development of modern practices of preservation and display. The second is to examine how the visual agency of mosaic has been exploited and manipulated through their reception, display and exhibition.

¹⁰ BBC News 2010, Chorleys Auctioneers, Gloucester, 24th June 2010 sold for £75,000

¹¹ Dawson, 2008

¹² Selkirk 1998: 19

¹³ Hobbs 2003: 76

Conventionally commentaries on mosaics situate them in art historical sequences, explain their iconography and, more recently, have begun to explore their role in the social practices of the Roman world. This book takes a different approach. It looks at their reception from the early modern period to contemporary life, at the agency of individuals and at the influence of the pavements themselves. It captures the excitement of their first discovery, the difficulties of preservation and the variety of display. By revealing the human backstories behind many of the most familiar mosaics the book charts how changing values have affected the way mosaics have been treated, how individuals and institutions have engaged in their conservation and how many mosaics have become emblematic of Britain's Roman past.

The discovery of mosaics has been instrumental in changing careers, in the development of some of the earliest techniques of managed conservation and through their display they have provided a vehicle for collectors and social improvement. The narrative in this book reveals individual agency and experimentation. It looks beyond the antiquarian experience to find alternative motivations and perspectives that have shaped the chief phases of evolution since the 16th century. It is an account which draws on concepts of design, fashion and reception in the development of a discourse, which at present is characterised by a mechanistic debate that focuses heavily on conservation and spectacle alone. The history discussed in these pages is situated in the growing analysis of early preservation and display, in the idea of reception, in changing attitudes to the discovery of Roman period artefacts and growing interest in the discovery of the past and how it has been represented. Over the past two decades reception, preservation and display have developed their own epistemologies illustrating how past practice influences the present.¹⁴ Not only does this development offer an 'opportunity to gain a more rounded insight into what happened in the past'¹⁵ and 'to examine the changing relationship between archaeological interpretation and its social and cultural milieu',¹⁶ but also to ask who values these aspects of archaeology?

This development can be differentiated from the epistemology which has developed around the conservation of buildings and is distinct from that of ruins and portable antiquities. Mosaics have not only created a conceptual legacy which extends into the art world, but a physical body of preserved and displayed pavements, both of which constitute a context for contemporary practice. A detailed study of the past, therefore, provides the basis on which to assess the legitimacy of present-day practice and to ask how artefacts, such as mosaics, contribute to the 'expression, construction and representation of identity'¹⁷ and how they should be treated as signifiers in the operation of cultural and social relationships.¹⁸

Attitudes and sources

Mosaics collected or displayed *in situ* in Britain are part of an extensive tradition. Their recovery, display and preservation has much in common with pavements in countries and states formerly part of the Roman Empire, or in former colonial and post-colonial contexts in Australia, Tasmania, Honolulu, America and Canada. Mosaics have become valued symbols of an important past, part of a post-colonial discourse of rising national awareness, and some examples have even been interpreted as a means to further integration in the *realpolitik* of

¹⁴ Barker 1999, MacDonald 1998, Cherry and Cullen 2008

¹⁵ Trigger 2007: 5

¹⁶ Trigger 2007: 4

¹⁷ Smith 2006: 116

¹⁸ Schnapp 1996: 11, quoting Pomian 1987

European Community membership.¹⁹ Academic study binds these artefacts together but so too, does heritage management and popular culture. They form part of a Western bourgeois culture which in the past decade has seen a revolution in communication and fierce debate about the role of display and heritage.

In the 20th century, some mosaics gained an internationally symbolic quality. In Baltimore, Ohio, the exhibition *Antioch: The Lost Ancient City*,²⁰ which included mosaics from the Antioch collection, opened on September 16th 2001. It was shortly after the events of 9/11 and reviewers drew parallels between Antiochene resilience to the calamities of the 6th century AD earthquake and local resolve to continue as normal after the attack on the World Trade Centre.²¹ In Australia the acquisition of the Shellal mosaic during the First World War may have signified the emergence of national history within, but separate, to that of the British Empire.²²

These anecdotes are a vivid reminder that the negotiations which take place following the discovery of a new pavement are part of a deeper social process. Despite this, the contemporary discourse remains characterised by technical concerns and although some commentaries have drawn attention to the management context of conservation, the present conservation discourse is still emphatically based on a narrow assessment of ancient expertise and resources.

Preserving antiquities in Britain

Conventionally the origins of preservation in Britain are well established. Several commentaries have examined the growth of concern emanating from Sir John Vanbrugh's correspondence with the Duchess of Marlborough, regarding Old Woodstock Manor in 1709, to the development of the earliest Ancient Monuments Protection Act in 1882,²³ though Hunter²⁴ saw genuine preservation beginning only in the 1830s, arguing earlier attempts placed "excessive emphasis on the exceptional [and] obscures the rarity of conservationist attitudes until quite recently...". Such an account privileges preservation in terms of building conservation. Yet it is in one of the earliest modern essays that M W Thompson, identified the origin of concern in an 'orgy of ruin making' after the Dissolution and after the Civil War, though it was not until in the 18th century, Thompson felt, that attitudes towards ruins changed from religious reflection to contemplation of the forces of nature. Such a change, he argued, gave rise to a more worldly concern with relics from the past which was expressed through the Picturesque and the rise of antiquarianism. But Thompson thought there was no question of preservation until the Gothic revival of the 19th century when the pleasure of ruins acted to stimulate restoration as a means of preservation and display. Thompson saw, too, that it was the philosophy of Ruskin and William Morris, encapsulated in the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings reacting against over restoration, which today provides the basis of modern conservation practice. For Thompson it was the work of artists of the Picturesque and Romanticism, the re-evaluation of architects, such as Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, and the response of Ruskin and Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement, as well as the rise of archaeology, which informed 19th century attitudes to ruins. Ultimately, they provided the context for the first Ancient Monuments Act.

¹⁹ Henig 1995b, 189

²⁰ Kondolean 2000b

²¹ McNatt 2001

²² Bennett 1995: 140

²³ Chippendale 1983a, 1983b, Carman 1996, Delafons 1997, Ashworth and Howard 1999: 35-59, Mynors 2006

²⁴ Hunter 1981: 23

Significantly Thompson²⁵ contrasted this insular historiography with attitudes in Italy, where, he felt, extensive ruins inevitably became a source of admiration and were invested with interest in their past. However, Hale has argued, it was the separation of the past from the present during the Renaissance which may have led to increased interest in ruins as relics of a past rather than part of an evolving present.²⁶ Briefly, antiquarian interest in the antiquity of the Roman Empire in England began to emerge during the 14th century.²⁷ Rome throughout the Middle Ages had been an influential part of religious life in Britain and by the 14th century the changes which would culminate in the Italian Renaissance began to spread northwards. Humanism, with its focus on the agency of man, led to an awareness and interest in antiquity and its material remains. In Italy academies arose which fostered the ideas of the new Humanism through secular scholarship and by the 16th century the stability brought by peace and the Counter Reformation led to the establishment of Rome as a major market for consumer spending.²⁸ The transmission of new ideas encouraged by institutions like St Paul's school in London intensified through the teachings of Italians who fled the Roman Inquisition, part of the Counter Reformation of 1542, whilst Italian Universities remained fashionable throughout the century.²⁹ It created a situation which led to the transmission of Italianate culture and antique taste to the elites of England and the development of an international market in antiquities, culminating in the Grand Tour collections. In a recent discussion Karmon, however, has situated the conservation discourse in a politicized concern for preservation in Rome which originated at least under Augustus and which, during the Renaissance, was a significant part of papal governance; arguing that the achievements of this period have been misrepresented by later commentaries, in particular that of Lanciani in the late 19th century.³⁰

Opinion, nevertheless, remains divided over the origins of preservation in Britain. The fashion for collecting classical antiquities, which became significant in England in the 17th century, has been identified as one contributory discourse. It had royal approval. Prince Henry collected coins and engraved gems before his death in 1612 and, in the early 17th century, collecting the antique became part of an aristocratic pattern of display. In 1614 Lord (Thomas Howard) and Lady Arundel traveled to Rome and took a particular interest in its antiquities, becoming the earliest significant English collectors of statuary and intaglios. Taste at first concentrated on antique sculpture³¹ and Arundel, who built his collection on acquisitions in Rome and from Constantinople,³² collected to enhance his status. Under James I (r1603-1625) antiquarian learning fell out of Royal favour, but the English continued to travel as merchants, bankers or students, and interest in antiquity turned to Rome and Greece under the influence of Italian tutelage.

Woolf has argued that conscious attitudes to preservation were evident from the mid-16th century. Medieval structures, which had been carefully refurbished to maintain their original freshness, were much admired, although restoration was appreciated for its aesthetic qualities rather than as a source of historic evidence. The key transition came, however, when the 'official abolition of relic worship helped to nurture, rather than to deter, an interest in antiquity' in the

²⁵ Thompson 1981: 95

²⁶ Hale 1954

²⁷ Hale 1954, Weiss 1967

²⁸ Goldthwaite 1993: 43

²⁹ Hale 1954: 2

³⁰ Karmon 2011

³¹ Haskell and Penny 1981

³² Hale 1954: 15

1530s, and the 'growth of an antiquarian culture was fostered less by the similarity between antiquities and saintly relics than by the cosmic correspondences and resemblances evoked by certain types of antiquities, particularly natural ones, such as fossils'. Despite Leland's 16th century Itinerary, Woolf saw mosaics contributing to the tangible past only by the late 17th century, exemplified by the discovery of pavements at Roxby and later Stonesfield.³³

An alternative discourse, Lolla has argued, developed at the start of the 18th century with the increasing popularity of topographical and artefactual prints. Once more, the inspiration seems to have been Roman practice, originating with three significant collections of drawings after the antique made by those who specifically set out to gather illustrations of all known antiquities: Cassiano dal Pozzo (1588-1657); Cardinal Camillo Massimi (1620-1677) and Pietro Santo Bartoli (1635-1700). The latter was responsible for most of the drawings in Massimi's collection.³⁴ These were familiar to English travelers to Rome in the 17th century and in the 18th century dal Pozzo's collection was bought for George III. Yet the later compendium by Bernard de Montfaucon (1655-1741) first published between 1719 and 1724 was published in an English version in London available in 1725, and by appointing the engraver George Vertue (1684-1756) the London Society of Antiquaries could be seen to have implicitly endorsed the principle of preservation by illustration in the early 18th century.³⁵

Sweet, alternatively, has argued that the principal trajectory towards the preservation of historic artefacts in the mid-18th century, grew out of an historicist approach to antiquity and the realization that structures, like books or documents, contained the evidence of history. Books, which had fewer practical problems and issues of ownership, were the easiest and earliest objects to be preserved whilst structures, which were invariably in private ownership, invoked the problematic issue of public access to private property.³⁶

Preservation in the broad sense of townscapes, landscapes and monuments which emerged during the 19th century, has been portrayed as part of the exhibitionary complex³⁷ explicit not only in the development of museums and the new ancient monuments legislation³⁸ but in the invention of tradition and the foundation of the National Trust.³⁹ The earliest legislation is commonly associated with relations of power, status and nationalism,⁴⁰ though Hingley has situated contemporary British interest in Roman imperialism specifically with the practices of empire.⁴¹ The 1882 Ancient Monuments Protection Act, together with university teaching and the new inspectorate of ancient monuments, was to lead to the emergence of the professional archaeologist and, ultimately, codes of professional practice.⁴²

Though a state antiquarian service was established in the early 20th century, preservation only took on an urgency as a public issue in the 1960s and 1970s.⁴³ By the late 1970s M W Thompson, then Head of Ancient Monuments for Wales, argued preservation *in situ* had two aims: to secure

³³ Woolf 2003: 184, 196, 205

³⁴ Joyce 2003: 530

³⁵ Myrone 1999

³⁶ Sweet 2004: 277-307

³⁷ Bennett 1995: 59-88

³⁸ Chippendale 1983a, 1983b

³⁹ Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983: 1-11

⁴⁰ Dicks 2003: 135

⁴¹ Hingley 2000

⁴² Smith 2004: 89, Thurley 2013

⁴³ Barker 1974: 28-33, Lowenthal 1997: 4ff

what remained and to render what had been secured intelligible.⁴⁴ Thompson emphasized that fuller understanding should be a constant objective and that display was a logical extension to preservation. At that time the key tools were the guide plan, signage, labels and models or reconstructions. Thompson argued that preservation and display had been essentially intuitive, almost casually implemented without rationalization – but that there was an underlying aesthetic behind the mown grass, oak steps and bridges of many monuments in care. Three years later, at Oxford in 1984, Stubbs described the traditional philosophy at the majority of sites managed by English Heritage or the National Trust. Precedence was given to an aesthetic which emphasized structural conservation and consolidation; presentation was managed through guide books and display boards and a self-evident building plan was developed where landscape restoration was used to indicate below ground features.⁴⁵ Thompson argued that the underlying philosophy should be one of integrated explanation – an intelligible account made available by an official guide or standard handbook, although the burden of investigation would remain with the visitor who, to get the most out of a ruin, needed to visit a library. It was an approach which created the characteristic well-groomed site, where building plans were supported by gravel and lawn areas with differential mowing suggesting changes of use, perhaps distant from an evident core of significant buildings. Thompson though, accepted that not all visitors were interested in interpretation.⁴⁶ But it was clear from Stubbs's description of the nature of display, in which key features should be discernible, that the character of display was determined not by market research but by the expectations of civil service professionals working in the historic environment.

In the late 1980s this approach was being challenged by the 'new museology' where emphasis was on greater engagement with the public. Working on the mosaics at Paphos on Cyprus in 1990, Stanley Price re-affirmed the aesthetic appeal of the historic site but drew attention to the associative or symbolic meaning of ancient sites and their educative value. He also noted their increasingly economic role in raising money through tourism or aiding regeneration.⁴⁷ In Britain the debate on accessibility continued during the late 1980s with the publication of *Visitors Welcome*⁴⁸ a manual for the display and presentation of archaeological excavations, in the light of the highly critical National Audit Office report *Protecting and Managing England's Heritage Property*, published in 1992.⁴⁹ Merriman's *Out of the Glass Case* in particular made the case for taking the museum to the public,⁵⁰ and at the start of the 3rd millennium Faulkner argued for community access to sites, for example, Sedgeford to carry out research and investigation.⁵¹ Yet community involvement at mosaic sites such as Lullingstone, and later Fishbourne, had been part of an established record of public engagement from the late 1940s and is a tradition which has much older roots.

The heritage debate of the 1980s had also begun to focus on society's response to preservation and display. Lowenthal, in particular, argued that preservation not only required a process of identification but that it was explicitly transformative whether through interpretation, reconstruction, reconstitution, relocation or re-use. The result was that 'such alterations

⁴⁴ Thompson 1981: 22

⁴⁵ Stubbs 1984: 81-82

⁴⁶ Thompson 1981: 31

⁴⁷ Stanley Price 1991

⁴⁸ Binks *et al* 1988

⁴⁹ quoted in Delafons 1997: 158

⁵⁰ Merriman 1991

⁵¹ Faulkner 2000

segregate or homogenize us along with our relics: as we reshape the past to fit present day images'.⁵² In 1996 John Carman quoted Mary Douglas on perception⁵³ to illustrate how society, in making value judgments, imposed a cultural bias on moral problems. It supported his analysis of how the law acted as gatekeeper in the 'processes of selection categorization and valuation [which] serve to guide components of the archaeological heritage towards appropriate treatments'.⁵⁴ Despite the publication in 1977 of Griffiths's *Politics of the Judiciary*,⁵⁵ which exposed the cultural bias behind judicial practice, another profession in which objectivity was considered the norm, it was not until the early 21st century that the philosophy underlying preservation was perceived as problematic. In 2004 Smith argued that the Venice Charter (1964) situated in post-war development, together with insular legislation provided the catalyst for archaeologists to lobby hard to take control of the archaeological resource.⁵⁶ By focusing on conservation and preservation in the face of accelerating development, the black market in antiquities and destruction by amateurs, the arguments privileged the expert. More emphatically, Smith argued, the determination of significance in the case for preservation in Article 14⁵⁷ of the Venice Charter was a key text that gave a philosophical basis to the technical task.⁵⁸ It is here where mosaics, such as Croughton, have illustrated the role of ownership in a further area of discourse. The individual or institutional owner occupies a complex space between the advancing regulation of governmental authority and a personalized response to the past. The later has been widely reported⁵⁹ and, although often anecdotal in format, important groups have emerged relevant to opinion forming, although analysis has tended to focus on who owns the past,⁶⁰ human reburial,⁶¹ repatriation,⁶² tourism, indigenous interest⁶³ and the antiquities trade.⁶⁴ Analysis of the relationship between professionals and such groups has grown in recent years, but by concentrating on politically charged environments, such as indigenous interest in America or Australia⁶⁵ or nationalism⁶⁶ has led to a situation, Smith has noted, where the seemingly ephemeral relationships established with developers, land owners, tourist operators and private owners or benefactors have received less analytical attention.⁶⁷

Displaying the canon

Over the past 30 years significant advances have been made in the analysis of display, not only in the art-world distinction between representational and experiential display, but in the social ramifications of display and its reception.

⁵² Lowenthal 1997

⁵³ Douglas 1982: 1

⁵⁴ Carman 1996: 40

⁵⁵ Griffiths 1977

⁵⁶ Smith 2004: 89

⁵⁷ Venice Charter 1964 Article 14. *The sites of monuments must be the object of special care in order to safeguard their integrity and ensure that they are cleared and presented in a seemly manner. ...*

⁵⁸ Smith 2006: 92

⁵⁹ Woodward 2001

⁶⁰ Lowenthal 1997: 55-87

⁶¹ Demas 2004

⁶² Beard 2002

⁶³ Smith 2004

⁶⁴ Renfrew 2000

⁶⁵ Smith 2004

⁶⁶ Kohl and Fawcett 1995

⁶⁷ Smith 2004: 9

A theory of display began to emerge in the 1960s when sociological analysis saw museums as class based repositories of attitudes to culture⁶⁸ which were both exclusive and alienating. The art gallery and museum created an environment which furnished a crucial component of the material and symbolic infrastructure of class based entertainment. Amongst museologists such approaches are recognized as confirming the status and position of the visitor in the creation of what has been termed bourgeois space, though over simplification may act to distance and mislead the very groups the display was intended to capture.⁶⁹ In this conceptual context the complexity and interest of mosaics is conventionally conveyed by reference to educational norms such as Classical mythology, the preserve of only a small minority of the community. Yet the portrayal of elegant and refined interiors could also be seen as the ironic portrayal of the colonial myth, though only by those familiar with post-Colonial perspectives.

Consequently the display of historic material, which is produced by a design informed by definite aims and assumptions and evokes a deeper meaning or reality, is, therefore, a form of representation as well as a mode of presentation.⁷⁰ In 1973 Hall⁷¹ had first developed a model analysis of communication in which the translation of a message was seen as the situated act of decoding by the recipient and encoding the production of the message. Although Hall's subject was the television, encoding/decoding provided a means to analyse the transmission of information in a museum and heritage context. Museums impose meanings which in history or site museums may be derived from current scholarship⁷² or subliminally, from a wide range of cultural sources. Consequently modern display can produce an intensified aesthetic experience which may cast the curator in the role of artist encoding as 'the new magician' and create the exhibition or display as a distinct object. As early as the 1960s the 'museum hang' had become the new pretender to originality⁷³ and the role of the curator that of impresario.

Critical perspectives on display until the late 1980s also focused on fetishism, the creation of a specialized domain which, by isolating objects for display, encourages viewers to project onto them meanings and values which have no basis in the objects themselves.⁷⁴ An alternative perspective by Pearce⁷⁵ which took up the transition from modernism to post-modernism in 1992, also saw museum practice as problematic. Pearce argued that collections in the late 20th century were part of the Western practice of Modernism which could not be understood without understanding the theory and practice of museums, of collecting and of objects in social practice. In the museum the organization and display of artifacts constructs a metaphorical meaning whilst objects always retain, in their materiality, a concrete relationship to their original context – that is they have a dual nature as 'real things' and 'constructed understanding'. Meaning, in the latter, is created through the display of collections which are an extension of self, selected because they embody knowledge, understanding and value but which are ultimately social constructs. Further, curatorial practice which drew upon professional traditions, historical, functional and structuralist, in the creation of display, were not transparent but part of the operation of power and control. In Pearce's analysis museums were not value free; they did not simply demonstrate what the past was like nor did the

⁶⁸ Bennet 1995, Duncan 1991

⁶⁹ Bennett 1995: 169

⁷⁰ Barker 1999

⁷¹ Hall 1973 'Encoding and decoding in the television Discourse'

⁷² Pearce 1990a, Pearce 1991

⁷³ Barker 1999: 13-14

⁷⁴ Bourdieu and Darbel 1992

⁷⁵ Pearce 1992

progression of museum displays inevitably lead to a clearer understanding. The museum was not, therefore, a privileged place but part of the wider social world. Display, Pearce concluded, always includes statements about the past which involve assumptions about meanings, the quality of those assumptions depending on internal coherence and correspondence to the evidence.

More recently Brenda Dicks has situated contemporary change in display culture at the 'intersection between individual biographies and social change' which has engendered a particular tourist gaze that seeks the means of encountering the self as other. Such a perception is neither nostalgia, because present day exhibitions no longer avoid difficult or discrepant experience, nor the fantasy of retreat, a rejection of the present.⁷⁶ For Dicks modern display can suggest both a better historic past, in the sense of shared community, and worse, in the sense of harsh conditions, but it is a past in which the modern means of presentation allow the visitor to see their own past in that of others.⁷⁷

Modern changes in exhibitionary culture, the rapid expansion of museum studies and the multiplicity of approaches in academic discourse have begun to expand the conceptual basis of display⁷⁸ to include the private sphere, historic performance – both secular and religious and re-enactment. It has begun to erode earlier perceptions of the difference between heritage as bogus history⁷⁹ and history/archaeology as disinterested enquiry and is leading to a more nuanced definition of heritage as visitable history.⁸⁰

Much of the present discourse on display derives from the creation of an aesthetic experience in fine art. As Thompson's description of the underlying aesthetic behind the display of many monuments in care and Dick's analysis of the performative nature of visitor experience suggests, many of these theoretical perspectives can be applied to the display of heritage. It is here, in the expanding discourse on display, that the presentation and depiction of mosaics has a contribution to make, not only to the literature on contemporary display practice, but also the historic development of display itself. Display is recognized as a fundamental part of the condition 'art' in Western civilisation, lifting objects from the mundane and setting them apart. By promoting an aesthetic way of looking museums therefore function as ritual sites.⁸¹

A second important concept to emerge from the early discourse on preservation and display is that of spectacle. It was originally defined by Debord who argued that life is largely mediated through spectacle, a static and distorted version of social relations. Spectacle represents alienation of the individual from reality, the more spectacle is accepted the greater the response mirrors that of those who represent the spectacle to the viewer.⁸² Associated with the consumption of mass culture, spectacle serves to uphold the interests of capital by alienating consumers from their real needs. Spectacle reaches its greatest fulfillment when the tangible world is replaced by a selection of images; when the commodity 'spectacle' has attained the total occupation of social life. As society develops and production becomes more automated

⁷⁶ cf Wright 1985, Hewison 1987, Hewison 1989

⁷⁷ Dicks 2003: 132-3

⁷⁸ Cherry and Cullen 2008: 2

⁷⁹ Hewison 1987

⁸⁰ Dicks 2003: 122, Smith 2006

⁸¹ Barker 1999, Duncan 1995

⁸² Debord 1983, para 30

so labour engages in serving the production of the spectacle, which the consumer demands.⁸³ Inevitably under the diversions of the spectacle banality dominates modern society. History, Debord argued, was the product of the ruling hegemony which promotes spectacular time. Essentially manifest in the return of pseudo-festivals, parodies of the dialogue and of the gift, the result was to incite a surplus of economic expenditure. In spectacular time the past dominates the present⁸⁴ and in the end cultural history is subsumed within total history and the preservation, of what Debord has described as the 'dead object'.⁸⁵ However, the absence of language he interpreted as a positive value within spectacle which promoted reconciliation with the dominant state of affairs.⁸⁶

In 1984 Baudrillard argued that where spectacle was the fetishism of image consumption the precession of simulacrum rendered the image so divorced from reality that the two are no longer connected; 'museumification [is] just one more turn in the spiral of artificiality'.⁸⁷ The spiral he described moved from a state in which the image reflected basic reality, to where it masks or prevents reality, then masks the absence of reality and finally bears no relationship to any reality, hence the simulacrum.

Criticism of both Debord and Baudrillard's concept of spectacle by Barker questions the explicit assumption that the viewer or visitor has no choice but to embrace images and abandon art as specialized and privileged. Inevitably, Barker argued, any critique of art and its institutions solely in terms of consumerist manipulation of culture would be unduly negative.⁸⁸ In contrast Cullen and Cherry⁸⁹ associated display with art history and spectacle with sociology. Situating spectacle in Duncan's 1995 analysis of the enlightenment mission which shaped private collections before, as museums, they became the focus of civilizing rituals, Cullen and Cherry argue that the demonstrable significance of these institutions is their facility in shaping behaviour and class identities. By 2008 this was being overtaken, not by the alienation brought about by spectacle which both Hewison⁹⁰ and Wright⁹¹ had described as decline, but by developments in the museum and exhibitionary culture. Today, the rapid expansion of museum studies and the multiplicity of approaches in academic discourse mean that display is recognized as part performance, secular or religious, that it can be educational, contributing to state or other ideologies; but that what is novel in current practice is the sheer scale of spectacle.⁹²

Barker has argued that such a concept goes to the heart of art display, particularly high profile or blockbuster exhibitions, where the outcome should result in an increased interest in art for more people. By extension such an interpretation of spectacle and display also applies to the presentation of antiquity, though such exhibitions are rare in the context of *in situ* mosaic display. Yet, if their display seeks to create a spectacle, perhaps through open days or re-enactments whose characteristics alienate the mosaic from its surroundings, whether

⁸³ Debord 1983, para 42-47

⁸⁴ Debord 1983, para 54-56

⁸⁵ Debord 1983: 184

⁸⁶ Debord 1983: 192

⁸⁷ Baudrillard 1984: 256, 261

⁸⁸ Barker 1999: 20

⁸⁹ Cherry and Cullen 2008: 2

⁹⁰ Hewison 1987

⁹¹ Wright 1985

⁹² Cherry and Cullen 2008

conceptual or physical, does it then subordinate archaeology and its institutions to commercial interest – a pretext for consumption through shop or café?⁹³

The concept of spectacle is particularly important to the display of mosaics because of the contemporary environment in which the Roman past is mediated by film, television and narrative fiction, as well as the museum display. A spectacle such as the toga clad elegance, familiar in many museums,⁹⁴ risks perpetuating a simplistic Roman past, transforming mosaic into cultural property for leisure time consumption which compromises any potential an audience may have for critical engagement.

Whilst spectacle addresses the social ramifications of display, perceptions of authenticity have been seen to mediate between spectacle and reception. Thiel, on the German-Rhaetian limes, argued that the juxtaposition of a replica monument and the original might act as a catalyst to improved understanding or elicit a more sympathetic approach to voluntary preservation *in situ* by developers. Here the physical juxtaposition of replica and original was interpreted as means of promoting the idea of preservation.⁹⁵ Others have seen authenticity as the factor which separates the *in situ* monument from 'heritage'.⁹⁶ Lengkeek has argued the concept of authenticity especially in respect to *in situ* display is both contested and contradictory. It is contested because although the scientific basis of a monument's age from origin can be established (objectivist) and verified by investigation, the act of investigation, display and analysis results in an authenticity which is, at best, the result of interpretation (constructivist). Moreover in the tourism discourse authenticity is often equated with 'real', itself culturally constructed based on film, the media, literature and education. Consequently in assessing the utility of authenticity not only does the concept itself require deconstruction but the response of visitors remains to be assessed. Drawing on Cohen's five modes of experience⁹⁷ Lengkeek suggests a matrix in which modes of amusement, change, interest, rapture and dedication must be set against the constituents of authenticity, which he defines as material integrity, conceptual authenticity, function (purity), context (original), historical (situation) and a-historic or antiquarian perspectives. Each of the latter must also be considered in the light of the visitors distance from the monument and their cultural context.⁹⁸ If the defining characteristic of the site museum is its authenticity, where authenticity is recognized as a negotiated concept, the nature of its display should reflect both that negotiation and its value.

An alternative perspective on authenticity is that of Ginsberg.⁹⁹ Treating ruins as works of art, Ginsberg has identified a similar range of responses to their characterization which he defines as newness (of experience), unity and integrity, discovery and exploration, springing forth (enticing the visitor), freedom and creativity, vitality, presence, shifts (of identity), movement (variety of perception), character sited (situated); incongruity and symbolic meaning (linking the past to a committed future by means of its presence). Ginsberg's symbolic meaning¹⁰⁰ is comparable to Lengkeek's third characterisation of authenticity, existential, in which the toured

⁹³ paraphrased from Barker 1999: 18

⁹⁴ Gillett 2004 on Corinium

⁹⁵ Theil 2008: 151-152

⁹⁶ Hudson 1985

⁹⁷ Cohen 1979

⁹⁸ Lengkeek 2008: 48

⁹⁹ Ginsberg 2004

¹⁰⁰ Ginsberg 2004: 159

object is a medium for the discovery of self. Consequently authenticity is not only a scientific concept, but one negotiated between the tourism discourse, heritage and the individual.

Tension in conservation and academic discourse as to when authenticity is presented is typically resolved by the techniques of display. However, perceptions of what constitutes an appropriate means of display shifted significantly in the 1980s towards economic value, associating display primarily with tourism and revenue generation. Not only were museums deemed to have the potential to situate cities in the global environment of tourism, goods and ideas – the Guggenheim effect – but the type of museum that tourism produces is becoming the model for purpose built museums, aspiring more to visitors than collections, to the vividness of experience, immersion in an environment, to action, to interconnectivity, to excitement and aliveness.¹⁰¹ Consequently the characteristics of cultural display now voluntarily reflect hybrid forms of experience such as shops, bars, restaurants, together¹⁰² with opportunities for interactivity and re-enactment.¹⁰³

Beyond the antiquarian

My book examines how, in the late 16th century and 17th centuries, increasing antiquarian interest coincided with the rise of sociability, the emergence of the guest and the visit. It was this social development which promoted the preservation of mosaics as conversation pieces, entertainments and objects of speculation. Such interest had, by the early 18th century, engendered a commercial value and by mid-century, mosaics had joined the canon of artwork and antiquities collected by the aristocracy and displayed as exemplars of good taste. Collecting, though, was not limited to the aristocracy or matters of taste. Amongst the ‘middling sort’ it focused on surviving fragments which, especially in historic centres like Cirencester, were displayed in gardens, put on display *in situ* or carried away as keepsakes and souvenirs. Here they provided a subject for comment and speculation distant from any concern related to taste

By the late 18th century, mosaics were familiar items amongst the literate classes for whom they may have forced a reappraisal of attitudes to Roman Britain. With the rise of the museum, panels of mosaic were increasingly deposited in public collections of antiquities, though they still remained attractive to private individuals. New discoveries were now exploited for their commercial value, attracting visitors as the newly developing pastime of tourism grew. From the end of the 18th century both owners and antiquarians alike began to appreciate the need for active supervision, if not formal conservation, of the sort provided by a resident caretaker.

The 19th century was a period of experimentation and diversification. Mosaics were for the first time cited in contractual documents to aid their recovery and some experimented with stewardship by commercial companies. In some circumstances, the discovery of a new pavement was attended by huge crowds of interested sightseers. As an artistic medium, mosaics entered the world of fashionable design at the highest level when, in 1843, Roman mosaic patterning provided the inspiration for the mosaic corridor at Osborne House.

Individual agency remained significant throughout the century. But in the last quarter of the 19th century, the Ancient Monuments Act promoted the rise of institutionalised conservation.

¹⁰¹ Witcomb 2003: 49

¹⁰² Dicks 2003 6-16

¹⁰³ Horsler 2003, Dicks 2003: 119

The Act focussed on the topographical, and mosaic sites briefly lost their pre-eminence amongst some antiquarians. Yet during the early 20th century the new profession of archaeology was once again instrumental in raising the profile of mosaics when their spectacular preservation became a symbol of the skill and expertise of this new calling.

After the Second World War several historic trends coalesced. For a brief period mosaics, together with other antiquities became symbolic of the post-war renaissance. But development was increasingly the cause of destruction in historic centres such as London and Chester, which ultimately led to a far greater emphasis on preservation. Mosaics became symbolic of loss. At the same time, a consensus was forming amongst professionals and government alike that led to the adoption first of the principles of the Venice Charter and subsequently to greater institutional control over 'heritage'. A permissive and authorising discourse began to emerge during the 1960s in which the expectations of academia and the regulatory authority were firmly established. It was reinforced as organisations competed for resources derived ultimately from politicised government expenditure, but outside this environment the availability of funding from tourism and patronage was also to generate an environment of economic competition. In the late 20th century and early 3rd millennium mosaics displayed *in situ* represents a broad spectrum of heritage management.

The evidence for the recent history of mosaics is extensive. The book draws on interviews with staff and site-based field work and has been informed by the evidence of display and documentary analysis. Where available I have used management plans, guidebooks and other related often unpublished documentation. The most important displays include Bignor, the longest surviving *in situ* group of mosaics on show in England, where the owners have responded to change as a family as well as to perceptions of public taste. Chedworth illustrates the role of conservation policy in the context of the National Trust, a large non-governmental organisation with considerable influence in conservation and heritage practice. Littlecote, recently re-exposed and displayed in heavily restored form, is an example of contemporary attitudes to authenticity and how the aspirations of different owners affect the nature of display. Fishbourne, perhaps the most well-known of the mosaic sites provides an insight into the balance struck by a county heritage trust in an interpretative display, somewhere between a popularising agenda and a significant academic reputation.

Nowhere is the variety of approach more evident than in recent decades. The impact of globalisation, in cultural terms relevant to the display of mosaics, is most visible in the range and scope of international conservation charters,¹⁰⁴ in the proliferation of international conventions on the illicit import, export and transfer of cultural property¹⁰⁵ and in the development of museums towards 'a global discursive system'.¹⁰⁶ Found in both public and private ownership, mosaics are not only archaeological artefacts important for their archaeological context, but artworks important to collectors and connoisseurs, significant elements of many museum collections and a vital element in early art history. A mosaic occupies a complex zone in which it is an art form,¹⁰⁷ representative of Roman fine art and a craft associated with interior decoration. Its status lies amongst the fine and decorative arts, in Fischer's terms 'mosaic

¹⁰⁴ Bell 1997

¹⁰⁵ Renfrew 2000

¹⁰⁶ Prösler 1996: 36

¹⁰⁷ Toynbee 1968, Henig 1995b

is both a queen and a Cinderella among the arts'.¹⁰⁸ Consequently the display of a mosaic occurs within a conceptual framework defined not only by the conservation of monuments, but by practices of display more familiar in the discourse on fine arts and museology. Yet the reception of mosaic pavements has no written history. There is no cultural biography of attitudes to them or associated with their exhibition and no theory has developed beyond that of physical conservation. The display of a mosaic *in situ* not only has a contribution to make to the emerging discourse on display, reception and interpretation but informs the preservation debate on sustainability.

This book starts with a series of simple questions, it focusses on mosaics as complex artefacts which hover between art and craft, anthropology and fine art, but which are often represented as simply decorative floors. As this introduction makes clear, once deconstructed, preservation and display, reception and interpretation provide an opportunity to see what happened in the past, to examine the changing relationship between archaeological interpretation and its social context and to ask who benefits? This is an extensive field and one for which this book can only act as an introduction.

¹⁰⁸ Fischer 1971: 6