A Mosaic of Recollections

Portrait of David S. Neal by Chris Prewett

A Mosaic of Recollections

Memoirs of an Archaeologist

David S. Neal

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Foreword

by Mark Hassall

I have known David for a long time, since we met during Sheppard Frere's excavations at Verulamium, the Roman name for St Albans, when we were both teenagers, and have been good friends ever since. Latterly, on several occasions, I have suggested that David write his autobiography although I wouldn't claim that it was due to me that he actually wrote the current work. However, when David asked me to write an introductory note, I was glad of the opportunity to explain why I felt it desirable to accede to the request.

Archaeology is the study of mankind's past through the investigation of material structure and artefacts, including decorated objects, that he left behind. Art on the other hand is concerned with the visual representation of a whole range of such objects, as well as natural phenomena. It is clear, therefore, that the activities of the archaeologist and artist are related and some of the best archaeologists have also been competent artists. Perhaps one of the most famous artist-archaeologists was Howard Carter (1874-1939), who was sent to Egypt in 1907 by the Egyptian Exploration Society and began to excavate sites under the patronage of Lord Carnarvon, and in 1922 made what was perhaps the greatest archaeological discovery ever, the tomb of Tutankhamun. Drawing for the next ten years, Carter meticulously illustrated the full range of his discoveries.

Turning from the archaeologist Carter to a couple of other artist-archaeologists whose work was largely concerned with the archaeology of Britain. We could cite Alan Sorrell (1904-1974) who studied at the Royal College of Art. Sorrell was largely a book illustrator and was responsible for the pictures in such books as *Roman Britain* (1961), by Aileen Fox, *Imperial Rome* by A.R. Birley (1970), and *Roman Towns in Britain* by Graham Webster, published in 1976 after Sorrell's death. Finally, one might mention Peter Connolly (1935-2012) who studied at Brighton College of Arts and Crafts, an expert on arms and armour, and whose first book on the *Roman Army* (1975) was followed by numerous volumes all written and illustrated by himself.

This short note is an attempt to set the work of David Neal, as both artist and archaeologist, in context and I shall leave him to speak for himself. As the title of the book, *A Mosaic of Recollections; David S Neal, Memoirs of an Archaeologist*, punningly implies, David's speciality is the Roman mosaics of Britain, and the question arises whether he was preceded by a similar artist-archaeologist who specialised in Romano-British mosaics. The answer to the question is, surprisingly, yes. The individual was Samual Lysons (1763-1819), English Antiquarian and engraver, author of, among other works, *Reliquae Britannico-Romanae*, which includes many illustrations engraved by him. It is Lysons who published the greatest of all mosaics found in the province – the famous Orpheus mosaic from Woodchester in Gloucestershire.

Acknowledgements

Many thousands of people have contributed indirectly towards this story and cannot all be listed here; many of them being staff and volunteers who assisted on my excavations over the past 65 years. However, some individuals linked to specific events are acknowledged, as are those who kindly provided information. I embarked on the project because many friends, including Mark Hassall, expressed the view that I should document my career and encouraged me to do so. However, not having previously written anything other than substantial reports, some perhaps turgid, I was initially reluctant, but, having shared projects on Roman and medieval mosaics with Stephen Cosh and Warwick Rodwell respectively (thank you both), I thought if they read it, I would get an honest response and accordingly showed them the early drafts. In all candour, had they doubted its worth I would have abandoned the whole venture but they were intrigued and kindly made suggestions which I have incorporated.

Managing the archaeological drawing office in my early career was a pleasure and therefore I am privileged to be able to record my drawing office colleagues, some of whom, sadly, have passed away, including Christine Boddington, Margaret Tremayne, and James Thorn. Others, fortunately, are still with us, including Tom Cross, Frank Gardiner, Peter Broxton, Daphne Hart, and Debby Fulford. Judith Dobie has been most helpful reminding me of events. A notable band of enthusiastic archaeologists helped me on the excavations over many years, creating consistency in the operations and their publication; stalwarts include; Jonathan Hunn, Angela Wardle, Michelle Nation, and the late Yvonne Parminter. Thomas Clark has been instrumental in preparing the graphics, and Noel Read the photography of some of the paintings.

Other general helpers include Anne Baker, Garry Budd, Judy Houghton, Takako and Naoaki Kanazome, Tony Moon of MFS Graphics, John Neal, Paul Simmonds, David Sherlock, Jean Smith, Ivan Smith, Mike Stanyon, Phillip Unsworth, and Sue and Mike Crayford-West, who have also helped source illustrations.

Finally, I must thank Mark Hassall for writing the Foreword. At Archaeopress, I am grateful to Mike Schurer for his foresight in recognising the aim of the work – to promote art and archaeology – and Robin Orlić and Ben Heaney who took the book through to publication.