

From Roman Temples to Terry Pratchett – the making of the Terry Pratchett: HisWorld Exhibition. *By Richard Henry, SCC archaeology curator, December 12 2023.*

The Roman Temple

During the period from 2010 to 2013 while Richard Henry was Finds Liaison Officer (FLO) for Wiltshire, an extraordinary series of finds were recorded on the Portable Antiquities Service (PAS) website, 63,000 from one site; and in 2013 geophysical survey was undertaken as a PAS Landscapes Project. Excavation was carried out for University students to gain experience, and identified a Roman temple of timber framed construction. The floors were made from local stone, and a revetment wall was terraced into the hillside. Although damaged by ploughing, a central post and pit were discovered, and this was where most finds were concentrated.

The finds comprised an interesting votive assemblage from the Late Iron Age and Early Roman periods, including miniature amphorae, Roman sledge hammers, horse and bridle equipment, and pieces made from ivory; also, a number of lead ‘curse tablets’. Many of these were vindictive and angry – one referred to a hatchet or axe “stolen from the house”. The temple was dedicated to a previously unknown god, Bregneus, and the assemblage suggested this could have been a ‘smithing’ god.

Once the excavation ended another hoard was discovered, which included one of the largest miniature swords from the Roman Empire. Sir Terry Pratchett had been knighted in



Hector Cole preparing an iron bloom.

2009, and decided that as a knight he needed a sword – to cut his sausages! He was intrigued by the finding of this sword and provided the funds for its analysis; and with a friend he collected lumps of iron ore in the fields and they attempted unsuccessfully to make a sword. With the help of Hector Cole the replica sword was created, funded by a grant.

Credit: R Henry

Sir Terry Pratchett died in 2015 aged 66 years, and Richard suggested an exhibition at Salisbury Museum to celebrate his life and interests – which turned out to be surprising. Terry Pratchett was once told by a head teacher that he would never amount to anything, and he was slow to start reading so his mother bribed him to read, at 1d per page. Later Sir Terry claimed to have read JRR Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* trilogy in one day! Terry Pratchett was awarded 20 marks out of 20 for a piece of his homework which was then published in the school magazine, earning him £14. He used the money to buy a typewriter and began to send M/S to publishers. In 1969 his first book was published, and eventually he was earning enough to give up journalism and write full time. He was influenced by Michael Ayrton’s book about Daedalus, *The Maze Maker*, and wrote to the National History Museum to ask for samples of insects: they sent him spiders and grasshopper/crickets.





The focus of the exhibition was a representation of Terry Pratchett's study, a window into his world with a bank of six computer monitors (when asked why so many, he replied "I don't have room for eight!"); and spaces for his cats to come in while he worked. Other items displayed were: the sword; Sir Terry's hat and leather jacket; his treasured Blue Peter badge; and honorary Brownie membership (Terry Pratchett was kidnapped by them).

*One of the replica swords.
Credit: R Henry*

Sir Terry was diagnosed with a rare type of Alzheimer's which caused loss of sight and as an artist he lost the ability to draw, saying: "I have the opposite of super-power, I can't see what is actually there." He was a vocal advocate for Alzheimer's and gave a certain amount to the charity every year. After his death he wanted his equipment to be destroyed, and it was arranged for his computer hard drive to be run over by a steam roller at the Dorset Steam Fair, with a great deal of publicity. Many direct quotations from Sir Terry's work were displayed, for instance "I believe that the sum of all our experiences good and bad are the things that make us who we are. That has the making of real magic. Please go out into this world and experience its wonders."

The exhibition was held in Salisbury in the winter 2017/18, and 21000 people came to see it from all over the world. Their comments reflect a high level of involvement. The exhibition was given an award for Museum of the Year, and also raised £40,000 for charity.

Sarah Hanna (thanks to Richard for proofreading and amendments)