

CA Prize-winner 2014: Paul Roberts



@ Ashmolean Museum

The Classical Association Prize is awarded annually to the person who, after nominations and deliberations, Council decides has done a tremendous job at keeping the Classical world in public view. This year saw the occasion of the tenth Classical Association Prize, which was presented to Dr Paul Roberts after a wonderful gala dinner in the beautiful surroundings of Colwick Hall in Nottingham. As Senior Curator in the Department of Greece and Rome at the British Museum, Paul's contribution to raising the public understanding of Classical art, artefacts, life and history has been vast over the course of his twenty-year career there. As an archaeologist, he has excavated widely in Italy and he has also taken part in projects in Greece, Libya and Turkey. Most recently, of course, he curated the British Museum's blockbuster exhibition: "Life and Death at Pompeii and Herculaneum".

The Pompeii and Herculaneum exhibition was an overnight success even before it opened, with almost 50,000 tickets booked in advance. The British Museum reported that it had already smashed its visitor target of 250,000 after just three months of its six-month run; by the end, the exhibition had attracted over 471,000 visitors. For those unable to see this marvellous exhibition in person, live cinema events were broadcast in over 281 venue across the UK, thus reaching a further 53,885 people. It was the first time the British Museum had ever shown an exhibition live, and recordings have since been broadcast across fifty-one countries worldwide. It can consequently add an impressive international audience of over 36,000 viewers to its UK based statistics.

These achievements have made the exhibition one of the most popular events in the 255-year history of the British Museum. *The Art Newspaper* reported a major leap in attendance figures for the British Museum overall – almost 20% up in 2013 to 6.7 million, overtaking the New York Metropolitan to become the second most popular cultural institution in the world (after the Louvre). Recently *Bookseller* reported on developments in the history and politics books market, indicating that they were up by 3% in 2013, with remarkable growth in the ancient history sector, which was up 45%. Much of this was due to the book Paul wrote to accompany the exhibition, which has sold over 29,000 copies to date.

This is all fantastic news for the museum and publishing industries generally, but it is an even greater cause for celebration among those who study or teach Classical subjects in schools and universities – or who promote them in the community at large. Since the exhibition's close, Paul has continued to keep it very much alive with a heavy series of public appearances at book festivals, school and university lectures, and community-based events.

In his speech of acceptance, Paul entertained conference delegates by reviewing some of the many tabloid headlines which featured the exhibition. Who can forget *The Sun's* coverage of "Romy Pompeii", for example? But he also paid tribute to all those who had helped in the assistance, planning, execution and promotion of this project, which was over five years in the making. It was a tremendous achievement and one which the Classical Association is delighted to reward. Congratulations Paul!

Dr Kathryn Tempest (University of Roehampton)
CA Outreach Officer 2012-2017

June 2014