

Echoes Through Time: Our Connection with People of the Past

Intro: Welcome to Hampshire HistBites. Join us as we delve into the past and go on a journey to discover some of the county's best and occasionally unknown history. We'll be speaking to experts and enthusiasts, asking them to reveal some of our hidden heritage, as well as share with you a few fascinating untold stories.

Ingrid: Today's guest is Carey Fleiner. She is a senior lecturer of Classical and Early Medieval Studies at Winchester University. Born in the United States, Carey earned her postgraduate degree at the University of Virginia, as well as a certification in Museum Studies at the University of Delaware.

After briefly working at the British Museum, Carey became a lecturer at the University of Delaware, before joining the history department at Winchester University in 2012. In today's interview, we will be talking to her about her classical research, her newly published book and her experience at the British Museum.

Hi, Carey, thank you so much for being here with me today.

Carey: Hello.

Ingrid: Could you start by telling me a little bit about yourself and your background?

Carey: Sure. I'm Carey Fleiner, lecturer at the University of Winchester in the history department, and my area of specialisation is classical history with an emphasis on Roman history. And I came to the university about eight years ago now. In the past, I've mostly taught modules on Roman history, a little bit of Greek history, some popular music, and some of my background is in museum studies, as well as medieval history. So kind of a Jill of all trades.

Ingrid: What made you choose to come to England to teach?

Carey: Well, I was a, what they would call an adjunct out in the United States, which is kind of like hourly part-time here. And I was just kind of spinning my wheels out in the U.S., and the opportunity came to come to Winchester, because my partner lives here, so we were looking for an opportunity for me to come over. But when I contacted a number of schools down here in the Southeast, Winchester was at that time planning the classical studies programme. So it was sort of being in the right place at the right time. When I was hired, one of the things I was meant to do was to work with the then Dean and then director of the history department, in creating what became the classical studies programme.

Ingrid: That's amazing. I didn't know that.

Carey: Oh, yeah. There you go, it's all down to me.

Ingrid: So what made you get into classical, I know you've studied some early medieval history as well. What kind of piqued that interest in those areas?

Carey: All of my studies, as an undergraduate and a graduate student, was medieval, it ended up focusing on the Carolingians with Charlemagne and that group. As an undergraduate, my - what you guys call personal tutor over here - encouraged those of us doing medieval history to take Latin, to take Roman history because that's such a foundation for medieval. And it turned out I really, really liked my Roman history professor, we're still friends. And so I took loads of classes with him and got this really solid classical foundation. Then in my post-grad work the main area was Carolingian. But you had to have like little complimentary side fields. So my side fields were Latin, Roman history, and I forget what the other one was, but I think it was palaeography, which is a study of handwriting.

Out of all the TAs, I got picked to do the classical classes all the time, because I had the background. I actually didn't teach any medieval. So when I went into my first teaching job, it was as a Roman historian.

Ingrid: So what are you currently working on now then, aside from teaching?

Carey: So I'm working on a book that will explore classical reception in the Carolingian age. How it's looking at sort of the classical world through this medieval poetry. And then I'm just in the planning stages of doing a more public engagement sort of project, which is going to be based around Pompeii, but during World War II. My dad was in the Navy, during World War II, he was stationed in Naples in 1944, and of course that's when Vesuvius erupted. Again. He was there after the worst of it, but he visited Pompeii, so I have a lot of pictures that he took of Rome and Pompeii and Vesuvius at the time.

So the pictures are great, I mean, they're really tiny because the camera he had only produced pictures that are about two by three inches and he traded pictures with the other servicemen. One of them was taken by a guy who flew over the volcano as it was erupting. And there's a couple others where they went up to the edge of the crater and took photos down in there, but that's what I want to work on. There's an archive down at the British School at Rome called the Ward-Perkins Archive and it's a lot of photographs and documentation about the bomb damage, because Pompeii was hit during World War II, and so I want to look through that archive. So I'm hoping, over the next few months, to develop a proposal to see where I can go with it.

Ingrid: Oh, that's really exciting. Do you have any huge aspirations for what you want to do in the future, in terms of research?

Carey: I think for that one, I really, really enjoy public engagement. So I'm really hoping that, that could be something that could be made into like a podcast or that somebody might be interested in for television, cause it would make a really good hours TV sort of programme.

As far as research-research goes, once I finish with the Carolingian project, I've got another project in the back of my mind and I'm thinking of working on something about Nero and the women at the Neronian Court. So that would take a little more research.

Ingrid: You teach quite a lot of social history, looking at more everyday life, women, especially in classical studies. So why do you think it's so important to look at these more common topics rather than just the political, military sides of history?

Carey: For me, the big political stuff, the big picture, we need to know that because that's your foundation, that's what everything's going to hang on. But when you think about it, there are so many stories that we don't know about, and what I find intriguing is how can you reconstruct other people's lives? So for example, if I want to talk about the women at Nero's Court, at first you think, 'Oh, well, okay, it's going to be him and his mother because you know, everybody knows about her and there's so much written about her and he had three wives.' So you start digging into who these other wives are. And then you start finding more and more women because you have to really start reading between the lines and picking through inscriptions and picking through all the readings.

I mean, the wife I'm most interested in is his first wife, who was his stepsister. If I gathered together all the documents written about her, I might have about 20 pages of material. So you start thinking, 'Well, how can I reconstruct her life? What would life have been like for a Julio-Claudian princess? Especially if her father is someone who is not expected to become emperor.' So I think what excites me, what interests me about the cultural history is the fact you have to do detective work, you have to reconstruct and it might not necessarily be accurate, but it's the best that you can do with a combination of resources. So you're looking at written resources, but also material goods. I just find assembling that puzzle to be quite interesting.

Ingrid: Why do you think that it's still relevant for historians today to study the classical and medieval world? From a non-academic point of view, it's very far away and very, seemingly, non-relevant to our everyday life.

Carey: I think you can find relevance in the classical world. You're right in the sense that they are very far away, but at the same time, very familiar in that we've inherited so much from the classical world, especially in the West, because the structure of Western society. So when you look at the obvious stuff, we've inherited language, with political structure, with urbanization. How many cities here in Britain alone have a Roman footprint? More and more, and what I try to bring out is looking for how much the same sorts of problems and situations that exist now, that you would have found in the classical, if not the medieval world. If I give you an example, this book project that I have, it's based on the work of this ninth century poet.

One of the reasons he writes this poem is because he was exiled. So he was driven away from his court and he really wants to go back home to this court. So he writes this really flattering poem. I have found looking at this poem very, very interesting, because it's led me to investigate aspects of Carolingian court culture that had been unfamiliar to me previously.

This guy probably wasn't really in exile. It's not like they banished him and said, 'That's it, you've got to leave your family and you've got leave your home and now you can't contact people,' because obviously he's written this poem. And there have been some scholars who've argued that these guys feel intellectually exiled. So they're away from the sorts of people that they can talk to because now they've got to go live in a different city. And a lot of these Carolingian guys who were really well-educated, they weren't poets by profession. They

tended to be ambassadors and they tended to be missionaries. So they have to take their great knowledge and their skills with speaking and go to an area where there are poor people, where they're out in the frontier because they have to do diplomatic missions.

So it is kind of an intellectual exile. But what I found interesting is they're writing these poems and they're sending them around for other people to comment on. And very much like social media is now, but when you start talking about the themes, I've had people say 'Can you imagine this guy on Twitter?' And that's exactly what it is. The poetry and communications are a little slower, but it's ultimately serving the same purpose.

There's been more study, both in the classical world and in the medieval world about themes of globalization. In other words, don't just study the Romans inside the barriers of the Roman Empire. How are they connecting with the outside world? There are so many other kingdoms and there's other civilizations, other empires all around Rome, it doesn't exist in a vacuum. I've been teaching about 25 years and I've had students say, 'Oh, but they've discovered everything, they've written about everything.' And that's not true, because there's always new viewpoints and there's always new discoveries.

Ingrid: You've recently published a new book called *A Writer's Guide to Ancient Rome*. Could you tell me a little bit about the book and how it came to be?

Carey: That is a book that's aimed for a more general audience. The plan was to craft a volume for people who wanted to write historical fiction, or maybe were designing games, or were thinking about going into film work, or even just people who weren't necessarily historians, who just wanted to know more about Roman society, the Roman world. So we've got a chapter on people. There's a chapter on clothing and shelter, basic economics, law and order. There's one on religion. There's one on sport and entertainment. So you can see as like a general survey. But what I was asked to do was to also provide resources.

You read some of these popular history books and they'll tell you about Roman religion, or they'll tell you about 'oh, gladiators.' But what if you wanted to know more, what if you wanted to read the primary sources or what if you wanted to know who are the essential scholars on Roman law? Is there any debate on the construction of Roman houses? So the book is a combination of being this introduction to the Roman world, for somebody who might not know anything about it, but also saying 'here's where the sources are.'

It aggravates me in popular books where they don't tell you where all the stuff comes from and the final chapter is bibliography. And it ranges from everything from finding a Roman name generator. I even found a website that if you're writing a story and you want to know what to name the Roman guy's dog, the sources range from, 'Okay, you want to know what your Roman is going to look like? What's his clothes gonna look like?' There are a lot of people out there who do re-enacting and they're serious about their costumes and getting it authentic and doing the crafts that's involved with it. Look at some of these websites because the work they do is beautiful. They're basing their work off illustrations and descriptions from the writing. So it ranges all the way from 'If you can read Latin, here's the online source.' So if you want to dig through those inscriptions in Latin, or if you want to look at a Roman Legion based here in Hampshire. And there's another one based up in London, I think. So if you want to go to one of their meetings or whatever, here's how to contact them.

I'm hoping that somebody could just read it for fun. It's not meant to be a book that you have to sit and read from cover to cover. You can just open it, because it's divided up into lots of little sections and that.

Ingrid: So do you think historical inaccuracy affects how the classical world is understood in today's society?

Carey: I dunno. I mean, films that take place in ancient Rome don't bother me because I wasn't trained as a classicist and I was trained as Roman historian, but I can't watch films that take place in the medieval world because they drive me nuts. Because there's so many inaccuracies in most medieval films. But, let's be honest, that's the gateway. That's where most people are going to be introduced to the Roman world, whether it's in a game or a movie or TV show. I mean, that's how I was introduced to the Roman world.

I remember when I was 10 is when *I, Claudius* originally ran on television. And my mother being sat there, avidly glued to the TV and me coming into the room and ask her, 'What are you watching?' And she said, 'Oh, it's all about this woman and she's killing everybody in her family.' You think as a little kid, that's going to be so exciting and you sit down and you realize, 'Wow, it's just a bunch of grownups talking.' But then I saw it again, about three years later when I was 12/13 years old and you're at that right age where soap operas hit you just right and, you know, just ate it up.

But, the first thing that you might encounter for the Romans or ancient history might be going to some museum gallery and looking at the mummies. So it really depends on what the medium is.

I think anything that excites people's imagination that they want to study this. I mean, I started studying Latin when I was really little, I was only about 10 years old and I didn't like it as a little kid. I didn't want to do it, didn't want to do it. Then again, 12/13 years old, see something, *I, Claudius* again, get super into it. And all of a sudden my Latin was really important to me. Our classmates thought we were so cool cause we were writing secret messages to each other in Latin. And I was just starting to get into pop music when I was about 12 and 13. So, you know, start translating pop music into Latin.

When I was an undergraduate, my main major was history and my second major was music. The pop music is, because the Beatles came to America. So they've always been a part of my life, cause my mother was a big Elvis fan. She grew up listening to big band and swing. And so she was very keen on pop music. She had her Elvis records and we had all the Beatles stuff. And I actually remember the Beatles. I'm just about old enough to remember my sister freaking out when they broke up.

When I first got my PhD, for about six or seven years, I didn't teach cause I was a caregiver, so I had to stay at home and look after a family member. And at that time, I had a little business doing hand work cause I had - I lived on a farm and just listened to the radio all day. So it's, it's always been a part of me, the music has always been there. And when I taught out in the United States, I also taught pop music classes. I did music appreciation for classical music, but I also did a lot of pop music stuff. And I have combined the two. When I came to Winchester, it was seen as very strange to be doing pop music on the one hand and the Roman stuff on the other.

I have actually managed to combine them in publications. I was told if I could combine them, I could continue getting funding. I published something for the British Museum about 10 years ago, and what I was looking at was a comparison between how parents reacted to rock and roll in the 1950s with how the church reacted to popular music in the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries. There are many, many parallels between the two of them. It was a big symposium that was being given at the British Museum all about medieval music. And I came in and did this paper and it was absolutely mental. It brought the house down and, so I got away with it.

Ingrid: Cause you worked at the British Museum as well. What department were you in?

Carey: I don't know what it's called now, but at the time it was called Prehistory in Europe. So it covered all the medieval galleries. I was called a curatorial assistant. So at the museum, every department has a keeper and underneath of them, they have experts who are the curators and they're responsible for a particular gallery or a particular aspect of that department. Amongst the duties that I had, they were planning a very small exhibition on seal dies, which - when you see medieval charters and they've got the little wax seals, these were the dies to make those seals that you would stamp. The wax would make the impression of your name, your crest or whatever, and the Museum's got loads of them. So I was helping to put that exhibition together. A lot of things that you see on display, that's just tip of the iceberg. I've been in the store rooms for the Museum and so many objects and items and the stuff that's not on display. Everything is put in a little bespoke box. It looks just like a little jewellery box. So if you've ever gotten like a necklace or a pair of earrings, it comes in a little tiny box. And all of these objects would be nested in a piece of styrofoam, that was cut out to fit them and I actually broke something that was priceless in doing that one day, but one of the things that I used to do was package these things.

So we did that, helped to arrange things, kids came in to do handling sessions, played with a lot of things. We used to be really naughty. We'd play Barbie dolls with the Lewis Chessmen, because obviously we could get into the galleries, before the public. And there's one day I was there with my boss and he got distracted doing something and we were rearranging the Lewis Chessmen anyway, and we just started making them talk and walk and playing with them like they were dolls and, Katherine Weikert, she's like, 'I'm not listening, I'm not listening', cause she thinks this is the most horrifying thing she's ever heard.

Ingrid: So how do you think that your experience working out at the BM has impacted the way that you perceive history as a teacher now?

Carey: It was so much fun. It was an opportunity. I don't think of historical people as being historical. To me, if I'm doing something with Cicero or I'm doing something with Augustus, it's this, to me, it's this, they just walked out of the room. We're only separated by time, but it's because I'm constantly using their works, I'm constantly talking about them, writing about them. When I sit down to write a lecture, I get so lost in the lecture. It's like when you played imaginary games as a little kid and you have the imaginary scenes in your head. So if I'm writing a lecture, I've got to put myself in that battle, or I've got to put myself in that diplomatic mission. And working in the museum, I got to handle so many objects. So back in my boss's office were cabinets that were just filled with medieval jewellery. And the rule was, 'Well, you can wear whatever you want, just make sure that you put it back before you leave for the day.'

So I would go and get my assignment from him in the morning and I would go back to my office. And I might be wearing, you know, two or three medieval rings that were a thousand years old. There are a lot of medieval textiles we just kept in a storage cabinet. And about 20 years before I worked there, they'd had a volunteer who went through and wrote description cards of all of these textiles because she was a textile artist and she was able to very, very accurately, but she used all the abbreviations the textile artists use. So they had all these wonderful cards and they had no idea what they meant. So I said, 'Well, I've been spinning and weaving since I was a little kid. Can I look at them?' So I got to handle shirts and clothing and one of the things I had to do was translate all these cards, I could read them. So to me being able to work in the museum gives you like a wider appreciation of this world. It's not just reading it in a book. Even if you can't work in a museum and you can't go rummaging through the storage rooms and you can't literally play with some of the stuff that's there, even if it's something small, go to Fishbourne. It's just up the road from Winchester. There are many Roman British sites all over the Southwest, that you can go to. It makes such a huge difference to just walk around a site.

The first time I went to the British Museum, The British Library was still part of it. I mean, this is a long time ago, this is ancient history. When you go in, if you go into what's the long galleries on the first floor. It's a really, really long gallery. That was part of the reading rooms. Some of the wooden cabinets that are in there used to hold the manuscripts. My point is, until the very first time I went to the British Museum and saw the British Library, as a medieval student and as a kid being interested, I had seen lots and lots of pictures in books of illuminated manuscripts. And first time I went, I was fairly young. I was, I was about 20/21 years old, so it was one of my first trips to the UK. And went to the British Library and of course they had manuscripts on display, but what was different back then was there was one room off to the side that had all the illuminated manuscripts in it. And they're not displayed the same way anymore, which is a real shame because the way they were displayed, they had little, tiny pin spotlights on them, like, if you go to a modern jewellery store, you know, cause they want you to buy the diamond rings and all that. So they've got little tiny pin lights in the cabinets that make all the diamonds look way more sparkly than they do when you go outside. And as I was walking around in the main room, I could just see this sparkle out of the corner of your eye. And I thought, 'What is this, what is this?' Because of course, illuminated manuscripts are painted with gold. The gold leafing on the flowers and the decoration, the gold on the letters. Gold doesn't lay flat, it's multi-faceted. So when you put a little pin spot on it, it's going to glitter like a prism. And walking into that room, as you moved, the angle of the light would change. And those manuscripts look like sunlight on water. I had never seen anything like that in my life. I was absolutely mesmerized. So again, being able to see this stuff live, if you can go to a museum that has a handling session. I mean, it seems kind of cheesy, like, 'Oh, they're letting you hold a Neolithic axe.' But when you think about it, that's 10,000 years old. So, I'm a real cheerleader for that sort of thing. Go and see it, go and touch it if you can, you know, go and walk around.

Ingrid: Makes me think of the amazing new display in Winchester Cathedral of the Winchester Bible, which really brings illuminated manuscripts to life. And that's literally on our doorstep in Winchester.

Carey: Exactly, I mean, to me, it's very marvellous that coming from the United States, that if I want to visit the Roman Empire, all I gotta do is walk out my back door. It's so close by for anybody who's here in Britain. I mean, the Roman footprint in Winchester is almost non-

existent now, because the medieval footprint - just wiped it out. But I mean, you've got Winchester Museum there and Winchester College has a lot of Roman stuff. It's really all around you, and I think when you grow up with it, you don't think about it.

Ingrid: And I think that's what I really love about Winchester especially the Heritage Open Days, it kind of opens your eyes to what's around you and rediscovering Winchester. And as a foreign student, that, for me, it was really special because I came here knowing that that was a Viking and kind of medieval footprint, but rediscovering all of that and understanding that actually it goes way beyond that and that there's so much that you can see every day that's actually of such historic importance. It's absolutely amazing.

Outro: We hope you enjoyed listening to today's episode. If you would like to find out a little bit more about what we've been talking about, then please visit the website, www.winchesterheritageopendays.org, click on Hampshire HistBites, and there you'll find today's show notes as well as some links to more information.

Thank you.