

# JUSTIN'S COMMENTARY

**SEVEN**   
Investment Management

Justin Urquhart Stewart is one of the most recognisable and trusted market commentators on television, radio and in the press. Originally trained as a lawyer he has observed the retail market industry for 30 years whilst in corporate banking and stockbroking, and has developed a unique understanding of the market's roles and benefits for the private investor.



## PORTUS II – LIFE IN THE TRENCHES

I suppose it has some similarities to a programme like 'Big Brother'. In that case a group of strangers is lumped together to live and work in close confines and then filmed to reveal some rather unedifying traits in their behaviour, whilst also fulfilling the voyeuristic expectations of an addicted audience. Well the Portus Archaeological Field School from the University of Southampton certainly had some similarity, but luckily it wasn't Big Brother and luckily there was no filming, no audience and no voyeurs. However what it did consist of was a rather strange concoction of individuals from all over the world who, over the next three weeks would have to work in teams in some remarkably close quarters on occasion, definitely imposing concern on any Brits fearing an invasion of their personal space. The question for me though was whether I would get through - despite a significant level of archaeological ignorance and incompetence.

So here are some thirty odd adults (with some emphasis of odd on some occasions) who vary from fresh undergraduates, to those doing their Masters or Doctorates, then some experienced amateurs, and finally a number of fiendishly bright academics. Oh yes and certainly one who had zero experience in either the science of archaeology or the fine art of trowel management. Thus no chance of hiding my ignorance amongst this lot. Then of course you have the different nationalities, all of whom have varying degrees of knowledge and experience in the language of English. From Estonia to Espania, from Britain to Brooklyn, from Serbia to Sussex, from the Antipodes to the Peloponnese - oh yes and Italians. Most I must say had far greater knowledge of both the English language and its grammar than the average Brit I come across.

Thus assembled a varied crew under the keen-eyed auspices of the professionals who quite rightly reminded us that archaeology is by its nature destructive, but perhaps it was suggested that we should not take that too much to heart but try and not destroy the very artefacts we were supposed to be finding.

Now for the dress code. The only measure I have is Indiana Jones, which didn't really help as I had stupidly left my whip at home. So shorts and dodgy faux Glastonbury T-shirts seemed the order of the day. I appear in some very elderly shorts, which reveal only some increasingly aged and nobby knees. Steel capped boots are also a prerequisite but I swiftly lose all street cred by not only having what were quite obviously spanking new boots that had never seen hard labour in their lives, topped off by my inability to take the sales label off. Now there are always wise sages who tell you how to break in your new footwear, and to be fair I had tried some earnest walking around Tesco's to this end. However I now realise that when they say you must break in your shoes, it is in fact the other way around, whereby the steel tipped boots break your feet into their shape, not theirs to yours.

The next faux pas was the choice of hat. "Have something that shades your neck" was the disciplined instruction. So to me that just started a search for a French Foreign Legion "Kepi" in the best Beau Geste style. Sadly my search was fruitless. So I had to make do with a cap that had an attached cloth covering your neck. The only problem with this was that one of the team was from China and asked the question as to why I seemed to be dressed up as a Japanese WW2 fighter, a group who are generally not held in high esteem (quite rightly) by most Chinese. Come to that, the shadow of my father would be horrified at such a sight.

As for the girls, well it was more of the apparent archaeological fashion of bra and vests strap entanglement that seemed to be the most popular. Some though were brave enough to give up on the shorts and go directly for tight leggings or even seemingly thick tights. Now of course that brings me on to the next problem - age.

I hope I have the wit to be able to talk to anyone in whatever form of English they bravely attempt, after all my language skills don't go much further than my early French classes of asking for the "pen of my aunt" (la plume de ma tante) which as yet I have never had the opportunity of using - mainly because I don't have any aunts left, with or without pens.

So the problem is this - how does a gentleman of a certain mature age start an engaging conversation with delightful young ladies without appearing either as a patronising old git, or some sort of ageing pervert? The key issue being of course is that you think you are younger than you are, and they have a desire to seem more mature than they are. This is made more difficult once assigned to our new world of our small trench, which in my case seemed to be the remains of a small room with no door, and full of concrete-compacted Roman artefacts and other discarded stuff. Therefore we have our group in our new world of Roman concrete (an incredible innovation, but quite unappealing if you are having to take it apart) for us all to start chipping away. So buttocks up and head down. Not generally an attractive sight with men who effortlessly adopt the builders' bum approach to clothing, but improved by the girls who seem happy to inadvertently advertise the maker of their knickers to whoever is nearby.

Then to work. Each holding our sturdy 4 inch trowel we are instructed to clear the trench - but with care and caution. The first issue to get over is the noise of steel scratching across 1900 year old concrete, which has all the appeal of chalk scratching across a blackboard - not once but for the rest of the day - and the next one. One of our party did produce a trowel as requested and for the required length of four inches, however her implement would be of greater familiarity to Alan Titchmarsh, as it was the near perfect tool for planting daffodil bulbs, but singularly useless against aggressive concrete. But this is our world. A small square of the world which gets our attention, where we kneel too closely to each other, scratching away and being quite oblivious of anything else around the globe, or even in the next door trench. The question is now though, how do I ask for my trowel back from underneath the bottom of my new New York neighbour?

Now heat. I hear England has been having a heat wave - well in truth two warm days followed by a thunderstorm. In Portus every day is hot and in the pit (sorry trench) even hotter, reaching figures well into the 40's. The old phrase is that men perspire, women glow and cattle sweat comes to mind. Well it would appear that within half an hour my more bovine characteristics were becoming obvious. It was as though I had created my own micro-climate of personal dampness.

Pain. For those who reject the purgatory of the Torquemada gyms which we are constantly being urged to join, and also manage to avoid with ease, the marginal attractions of half and full marathons (which back in the day I was quite good at) it was a clear fear of pain from suddenly forcing muscles to be brought to life after many decades of somnolence. Heat, aches and pains with illustrative blisters were going to be commonplace, but thank heavens for the British attitude of stupid personal pride, in that you have to go on, not so much to let down your colleagues if you gave in, but rather the personal humiliation of looking a complete twit. Thus with false bravado, assisted by extra wine in the evenings and innumerable rolls of sticking plasters to ease re-shaped feet, we were all able to continue.

Of course there was the glorious depth and range of knowledge of those who managed the team and field project. You soon became aware of an astonishing expertise, from interpreting brick stamps by their date, production and usage, through to their ability to identify even the slightest change in "context" (their term for a change in the makeup of the levels we were trying to mole through). To the outsider this could seem like academic bureaucracy, but you soon became aware that such attention to detail was vital in co-ordinating and understanding the story through which we were living and digging. This was not the Nesquik archaeology of television's Time Team, but rather a true professional evaluation of what we were doing not just by judicious trowel handling, but with the appropriate application of geophysics and photogrammetry.

Only after seeing this site did one start to see the true size of this port complex and with the linkages with the other ports on the Tyrrhenian Coast all designed seemingly to feed the often unruly beast with a population of approximately 1 million souls that was Rome in the first century AD. To the outsider what looked like a huge 19<sup>th</sup> Century reservoir some two kilometres inland, would seem to be of limited interest, until the uncovering of key parts of this huge integrated industrial structure that revealed the largest man made port in the world and something of the scale of The Port of London in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. With the imports of wine, olive oil and grain, this was quite literally the lifeline of the Imperial command that fed the baying populist masses of citizens of Rome.

So what look like a series of small undulating hills with Roman pines liberally spread throughout, turns out to be an integrated mercantile system of vast proportions. However these weren't just buildings thrown up to solve a problem, but what becomes apparent is the logical thinking and creation of the Roman Empire where longer term strategic planning provided the strength of the sprawling Empire for over 400 years. Let's juxtapose that with our own inability to agree and eventually build an extra airport runway in southern England for over twenty years!

If the sites of Pompeii and Herculaneum are astonishing revelations of Roman domestic life, Portus must be one of the key revelations of the economic structures for this astonishing Empire.

The end of the day shows a level of exhaustion, but in a positive way as exchanges of finds, aches and pains are shared. I personally am not a fan of what is to me quite tasteless lager, but the pull of the near frozen Peroni on the return to our nocturnal "digs" from our daylight digs, I found I was close becoming a religious zealot for such a drink.

So I know now that at least I can survive the first few days without causing too much chaos, however my name seems to have been adjusted to reflect my trench neighbourhood near the loos as I have been given the colloquial title of Justinian Latrinus.

Well the only way is down then.

Have a good week.

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