

An Egg-citing Discovery!

Sometimes it is not man-made items that give us information about the past. When the Roman Baths were rediscovered in the 19th century there was great excitement about what it would tell people about how the Romans had lived in Aquae Sulis (the Roman name for Bath). It also raised as many questions as it answered.

One question they had was, what happened to the Roman Baths after the Romans left?

Then, very unexpectedly they found something to help them answer the question



An egg!

It was found in 1882, when archaeologists were digging in the ambulatory (walkway) around the edge of the Great Bath. According to Major Davis it was found 'thirteen feet (about 4 metres) below the present surface'. This meant that it must have been laid in the soil, after the Romans left in 410AD, probably in 5-6th century.

What was it doing there?

The egg was laid by a teal, a small duck. Even today, in winter, the birds congregate in low-lying wetlands in the south and west of the UK. Teal will not lay their eggs anywhere else. This told Major Davis that after the Romans left Britain the soil that buried the Great Bath was wet enough that the teal liked to lay its egg there. The ground was deep with mud and probably very marshy.

So we learned more about what the site of Bath looked like 1600 years ago, all from a birds egg!



Here is an outline of a teal duck for you to colour in. You can use felt tips or pencils. If you have the materials you might like to try making a wax-resist picture.

You will need:

Wax crayons (an old candle will do), water colour paints and brushes.

What to do:

Draw a pattern with the wax crayons on your teal outline. When you are happy paint over the teal with paint. Use plenty of water. The paint will cover the paper but won't 'stick' to the wax. Just like water from a real teal back!

Or

You might like to hard boil an egg and decorate it! You can paint it like the egg found at the Roman Baths or create your own design!

Or you can decorate your egg with our special recipe!

Take an egg (fresh or hard-boiled). Using a white wax candle or crayon, draw patterns on the eggshell. Repeat. Put outer skins of brown onions in a stainless steel saucepan (skins will dye other pans). Cocoon your decorated egg(s) in the onion skins and cover with water. Bring to boil and simmer. If eggs were unboiled, simmer for at least 8 minutes until hard boiled; if already hard boiled they can be simmered for less time. The longer eggs are kept in and the more onion skins there are, the darker the eggshell will be coloured, from yellow to deep brown. End colour will also depend on original eggshell colour. When ready remove and cool rapidly in cold water. Patterns should show white or paler than rest of shell. Polish with a bit of cooking oil on paper towel.

To find out more about teal and birds in general go to:

www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/bird-a-z/teal/

