**Dr Matthew Fitzjohn**

You're listening to Tails from the Square with me Dr Matthew Fitzjohn in the Department of Archaeology, Classics and Egyptology at the University of Liverpool.

I’m a classical archaeologist. So my research is on the Greek and early Roman world. So my work is based in Greece and in Italy. And I study the period from around about 1000 BCE, through to around 400-350 BC. Over the last few years, I've been focusing my work on houses, and daily life, what it was like to live in the ancient world, specifically interested in the houses in early Greek cities, and what it was like to build the houses how they were decorated, and how people experience them.

Grand Designs in Ancient Greece is an Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded project that is taking my research on Greek houses, and developing teaching packs and resources for primary school and secondary school teachers to teach about the ancient world, to feed into history lessons, but also to expand its cross curricular. So it's teaching geography, science, maths, and literacy, all part of this understanding about Ancient Greece. And one of the key parts of the project is that we use Lego for students to build their own models of Greek houses, and to write stories. So we use the Lego to create scenarios where children can learn about the ancient world and then take a moment from daily life and write their own story using Lego scenes about the ancient world.

This research project develops out of some of my research on houses, and it was funded by the AHRC. So it was a follow on fund to take my research that academics and students might read and to find ways that the research become more valuable, seen by more people and influence the UK more generally. And so it developed from my research, but also from my teaching. So I teach a third year module on houses and households in Greece, and in the Roman world as well. And as part of that module, students build 3D models of houses. And sometimes students have been experimenting with building in other media from using cardboard to Lego. And so I thought this would be a great way to take the research to schools, to make it a hands-on activity where children learn through plays, they're learning about the ancient world, but they're also getting to build and learn through playful activity.

Lego is a great way for children to learn about the ancient world because it's a very playful activity. So what I didn't want was to create resources and activities that were teacher-led, until we're just learning about the ancient world, learning facts. I decided I was using Legos so that children could learn the facts about the ancient world, but then could very much learn through play. They could create their own stories about the ancient world by building the scenarios and narratives, and really interpret the past with the factual information we provided from my research, but to, to write their own stories about the past to have fun when they're learning. And the other key aspect about the Lego is that whilst you can the teachers can devise activities that are very much focused on history and literacy, we could also develop activities that were very much focused towards mathematics. So for example, a Lego block is a scale representation of a real world mudbrick that the Greeks were using to build their houses. And so you can build in activities to do with learning about perimeter and scale and measurement and area so the Lego can be a great way to perform activities to do with other subject areas.

**Dr Peter Bulmer**

My name is Dr Peter Bulmer, and I'm an archaeologist at the Archaeology, Classics and Egyptology Department at the University of Liverpool. I got involved with the Grand Designs in Ancient Greece project in 2016, after I'd finished studying, and I was one of the principal Lego designers on the project, I did a lot of the work around producing materials for schools, and had quite a lot of fun building houses and doing things wrong and making it up into that and again, and perfecting the models really enjoyed doing that work.

I've been a fan of Lego since I was a child, I own LEGO that's more than 40 years old. And I've always built with Lego. So this was a dream job for me really, archaeology and Lego combined, I couldn't believe my luck.

One of the things I really love about the Grand Designs in Ancient Greece project is that lots of primary school teachers, and I guess some secondary school teachers, they're not experts in ancient Greece. And when they look around to try and find resources, they'll find information about the Olympics, ancient Greek politics, Sparta sometimes, and warfare. And many of the times this is really associated with men's activities and the importance of men in the ancient world, we forget about women and kids. So what I love about this project is because it's focused around domestic architecture and houses as living spaces, but also working spaces, you get to hear about what women were doing all day. Obviously, there's some men there as well, but women and kids as well in that part, their childhood, in the working lives that they had in these spaces. So I think it sort of shifts the emphasis a little bit. And I think this is really complements what it's easy to find out online about the Olympics or Greek religion, you get this other side of things.

So it's really special thing about the project, I think part of it is interpreting the evidence that you get. And of course, it's like a jigsaw, we have two pieces missing, you don't get all the evidence, and you have to try and bridge some gaps and try and work out how things worked. And we looked at some of the models of the ancient Greek houses that had been sort of created by archaeologist. And it was only when we were trying to rebuild them with Lego that we realised some of the interpretations that have been made, for example, we found a flight of stairs that had been interpreted in one direction. And when we put it together and worked out how it would fit in the house, it didn't make sense. When we put the stairs in the other direction, suddenly, the workflow and the movement around the house made sense. So part of the process, I guess, was building the houses is, and this is what the kids get out of it as well. Building houses makes you understand how the houses worked. It's not just copying a plan or a model by rote, it's, it's a thinking process. And it was really interesting to do that and gave us new ideas.

**Dr Matthew Fitzjohn**

We've often been in the classrooms teaching as kind of the initial the starter for the sessions, and then teachers have taken the activities forward. And what's been really rewarding is the response to those sessions. There's very much because the pupils are writing their own stories and building, they have much more, they have a greater sense of ownership of what they're doing. They also have a lot of fun in the classroom as well, because they're building and they're thinking about the historical evidence but, but kind of learning through play.

The other aspect is the fact that it's been really great for group work. The students have responded really well to building together and working together in the classroom. And I think Lego has been a great hook to enable that to happen because they've got to collaborate when they're building models or creating mosaics, the responses from the teachers about how children with special educational needs have really engaged with the opportunity to work through problems and activities with the Legos has been a great focal point. So it's been accessible for kind of the full cohort of students and everyone's been able to participate. I was amazed in some of the schools, I was presented with the stories that children had written after they'd built their Lego scenes. And it was it was great to see the ways that children with special educational needs had participated fully within these activities and the way that they had responded to the challenges of the activities.

We've entered a new stage of the project trying to open up collaborations with more schools in Merseyside. We're going to Ormskirk to collaborate with West End Primary School. We're also working with National Museums Liverpool as part of the being human festival. And we're hoping to expand that into other activities. As part of their ongoing exhibitions next year. We've also worked with the Atkinson in Southport.

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You can learn about the ancient world by looking at some dusty old texts, looking at a series of small walls when you go to a site and it doesn't always make sense to you. The great thing about this is that by building and trying to understand and how things worked, and creating it yourself and telling stories itself. It's a fascinating and exciting way of learning that really gets into kids. And you can see the kids are really, really engaged with this.

I remember learning about the ancient world when it was at school. Number one, I didn't believe anything they said, number two, it was really dull. This is so exciting. And you can see the enthusiasm and it's lovely that with Grand Designs, we’re obviously we're going for the history curriculum, but it spreads out much more into English and history and maths and art and it covers all these different areas. So you get that enthusiasm for the kids. That is the opposite of what it was like when I was at school and I just love it. I'm dead enthusiastic about it.