

Society of Museum Archaeologists

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The deadline for contributions for the digital Spring 2012 Newsletter is 29th February 2012 and should be sent via email to Katherine Baxter, Newsletter Editor, at katherine.baxter@leeds.gov.uk.

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To find out more about the Society please visit our website at www.socmusarch.org.uk

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the 51st issue of the Museum Archaeologists News, keeping you up to date with the latest happenings in the world of museum archaeology.

This issue starts with an update from Duncan Brown, who talks about a new revised and updated section of the AAF's 'Archaeological Archives' publication.

We see human remains in the headlines again as David Allen discusses the statement published on the BABAO website which directs human skeletal collections towards teaching institutions.

An article on page 3 outlines an exciting exhibition called 'Treasures from the Earth', the only touring exhibition to have been put together by a consortium of hub museums in the South West. Involving Plymouth, Cornwall and Exeter, and sponsored by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Renaissance in the Regions, it sets out innovative ways of museums working together.

And in our final articles on pages 5 and 6, David Allen talks us through two very different objects in the Hampshire collections in 'Small Find – Big Impact?' and 'Heading Home'.

Don't forget to book your place, if you haven't already, on the 2011 SMA Conference 'Making an Impact: why museum archaeology matters', to be held at M-Shed in Bristol in November. With a wide range of influential speakers, it promises to be a stimulating event. Details can be found on page 7.

I would like to thank all our contributors for their articles in this issue. Please send articles of interest and details of any upcoming exhibitions and courses (including images) for the next edition (Spring 2012) to katherine.baxter@leeds.gov.uk

Katherine Baxter
Newsletter Editor

'Archaeological Archives' updated

One of the recommendations of the Southport Report was that the AAF should produce an updated, or more extensive, section on Selection and Retention to add to its 2007 publication 'Archaeological Archives'. It is pleasing to be able to report that this has already been achieved and the new pages should be on their way to SMA members very soon. These will be in the form of two sheets that can be inserted into the existing publication utilising the ring-binder design. A new contents page has also been produced. The print run will be sent to the IfA, who are managing the work and they will send the requisite number of copies on to the SMA for distribution to members. Production was funded by English Heritage and the text was written by Duncan Brown, the original author, with Claire Tsang. Both of them work in the Archaeological Archives team at English Heritage, and are also SMA members.

The revised section includes a step-by-step guide to the recommended procedure for deciding retention priorities during the course of an archaeological project. Selection applies to documentary archive material as well as finds and the essential principle is that the process is based on deciding what is to be retained rather than looking for what can be dispersed. SMA members might be interested to know that the final page of the new section is an image of a gallery in an archaeology museum somewhere in the south of England. A photograph was required to fill what would otherwise have been a blank page and in the spirit of the publication it had to be representative of archaeological activity. A museum display was not included first time around, so this new insert has provided the opportunity to rectify that.

Duncan H. Brown
Head of Archaeological Archives
English Heritage

Looking After Human Remains

A few months ago we noted that BABAO (the British Association for Biological Anthropology and Osteoarchaeology) had a more or less unqualified invitation on its website to museums (and other repositories) to direct human skeletal collections towards teaching institutions. They cited the

increasing costs and other problems of curation and the vulnerability of such material to disposal or reburial and attached a list of institutions that were willing to take collections on board. This didn't make for particularly comfortable reading as, perhaps not surprisingly, it appeared to be ready - in some instances - to view the material in isolation.

Our committee, and wider, deliberations and communications dredged up one or two 'red herrings' such as the Human Tissue Act and the difficulties of dealing with any recent or undated material. They also coincided with the 'forty professors' protests over the 2008 Ministry of Justice legislation which decreed that excavated human remains be reburied within two years, regardless of their age. In essence, though, we were agreed that human remains, when part of an archaeological archive, should remain with that archive and not be separated out.



Re-examination of an Iron Age infant from excavations at Winnall Down, Hampshire

BABAO have amended their statement to acknowledge that in the first instance the duty of caring for an archive lies with the appropriate local authority, but they still direct attention to a list of twenty or so teaching institutions that will take material.

Our concerns remains the same; that archives will be fragmented, that material used for teaching purposes will be subject to considerable wear and tear and that over the passage of time, with changing personnel both at the museum and university end of things, associations and significance will be lost.

But what do you think? If you have an opinion on this issue do let us know.

BABAO statement and links:

"BABAO acknowledges the value and importance of proper curation of human skeletal collections from archaeological contexts, as well as those from former anatomical collections. Correct storage in appropriate facilities is crucial to the success of ongoing and future research involving such collections. In recent years growing numbers of human skeletal remains have been excavated in the UK, largely in relation to development-led archaeological projects. The results of these excavations have placed increased pressure on curating institutions to provide adequate storage facilities. Although we believe that the duty of curation for these remains and their accompanying material culture lies with local authorities in the first instance, we also recognize that, due to a variety of factors, some are vulnerable to disposal/reburial, which is counter to our organisation's ethos. Therefore, we offer to find appropriate curation facilities for these remains through participating departments on a case-by-case basis. These will be used for both research and teaching.

The link below provides a list of institutions which are prepared to receive collections of human skeletal material in need of curation. All of these institutions have appropriate storage facilities, written policies on the curation of human bone and staff that are suitably qualified and experienced to care for human remains.

Museum curators, project directors or others wishing to make enquiries regarding the possibility of depositing skeletal collections with these institutions are asked to contact them directly using the details given on the spreadsheet."

<http://www.babao.org.uk/index/institutions-receiving-skeletal-collections>

David Allen

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Treasures from the Earth A partnership project

As Renaissance in the Regions winds down and the museum sector prepares to embrace the outlook and frameworks instigated by the demise of MLA and the transfer to Arts Council England (ACE), it is appropriate to celebrate the success of a project conceived of and realised by the curators of archaeology at Plymouth City Museum & Art Gallery (Fiona Pitt), the Royal Cornwall Museum (Jane Marley) and the Royal Albert Memorial Museum (Tom Cadbury).

Treasures from the Earth is a touring exhibition put together with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Renaissance in the Regions. For three years it will be travelling round museums in Devon, Somerset and Cornwall. Free to hire, it is the only touring exhibition to have been put together by a consortium of hub museums in the South West.



The aims behind the exhibition are to inspire people to get involved in archaeology, to tell them about the archaeological scene in their local area and to get finds stored either locally or regionally back on show to the public in their local museum.

The show consists of a core of 30 items from the organising museums and a selection of museums in Somerset. They are supplemented by graphic panels and games such as *plan the skeleton*, *make a mosaic*, *sort the finds*, which are designed to introduce visitors to archaeological skills. At each venue a second case and accompanying graphic panel is produced on a theme of the museum's own choosing. Objects for this case have been borrowed from a variety of lenders - the hub museums, university departments,

archaeological units and societies, metal detectorists - or taken out of the host museum's own store. Penlee House Gallery & Museum in Penzance secured the loan of the beautiful gold lunula from Penwith from the British Museum and Lawrence House Museum in Launceston borrowed a rare 13th Century Middle Eastern enamelled glass vessel found at Launceston Castle from the Victoria & Albert Museum. These loans certainly ticked the exhibition's aim of bringing archaeological material back to their original find spots.



Host museums also benefit from the expertise of the curators of archaeology at the organising museums, the county Finds Liaison Officers (FLO) and Museum and Conservation Development Officers (MDO and CDO) who run training and activity days according to the request of the museums. In Cornwall the Royal Cornwall Museum has funded a special education programme which will help the host museums run activities for schools and create handling and learning resources that will be available to museums beyond the life of the exhibition. The whole is co-ordinated by a project manager who reports to the steering group of the three wise curators.

The exhibition began its tour in Torquay in February 2009. From there it went to South Molton, Combe Martin, Kingsbridge and Tiverton before moving to Somerset for a year. It opened in Wells & Mendip Museum in March 2010,

moving on to Crewkerne, Weston super Mare and finally Yeovil. In March 2011 it crossed 2 borders to Cornwall, to open at Penlee House Gallery and Museum in March, and Launceston in May. It is currently at Helston Museum and moves to its final stop in Bude in December where it closes in February 2012.



To date the exhibition has been seen by over 21,000 people – just under 1/3 of them children. Nine finds identification sessions run by PAS finds liaison officers, 13 family activity days, four staff/volunteer training sessions and eight talks have been organised by the host museums. Local archaeological societies, museum volunteers, children, archaeological units, metal detectorists and university departments have all participated, either through lending material for exhibition, providing information or taking part in activity days. Wells Museum organised a day of Roman drill complete with centurion. Combe Martin Museum led beach combing and finds identification forays. Lawrence House Museum in Launceston ran *Murder in the Museum: Assassination of an Archaeologist*. Several museums organised special opening events. Wells Museum and the Museum of South Somerset hit the jackpot with Mick Aston and Mark Horsten doing the honours respectively.

Several partnerships have been inspired or strengthened by this exhibition. The Historic Environment Services in all three counties have provided images for the graphic panels and

contributed lectures to host museums' special events calendars. Museum Development Officers have supported host museums and used their expertise to negotiate loans from the Nationals.



The project has a cash budget of £63,000. Help in kind from the MDOs, CDO and FLOs and the hours contributed by the many volunteers in the community museums themselves (161 days and still counting) all boosted capacity and heightened the impact and reach of the project. As well as the cost of the exhibition design, hardware, graphics, interactives and touring, the project budget paid for a part time project manager and provided funds for host museums to develop their activity and training programmes. It covered some of the cost of transporting and couriering the 2 loans from the nationals in London. It is funding two training days on putting together touring exhibitions, which will be run on the project's behalf by the South Western Federation of Museums & Art Galleries as part of the South West Museum Skills Programme. The provision of skills sharing and training have been key aspects of the project to ensure community museums reap benefits that will stand them in good stead in the future.



The time spent by the three curators developing the project in the run up to the opening and steering it over the three years of the tour should not be underestimated. They have all been committed to the project at the same time as working on major gallery re-displays and museum refurbishments. Each has also had the added uncertainty of at least one major staff restructure to contend with during the lifetime of the project. Barbara Wood, then a freelance museum consultant, was employed to put together the HLF 'Your Heritage' bid. She not only developed the curators' original concept but also gathered evidence of need and estimates, secured partnerships and drew up the budget. Another freelance curator, Vicky Dawson, was appointed project manager once funding was secured. She has been responsible for the detailed development and on-going management of the exhibition. All members of the steering group agree that these contracts have been essential to the success of the project as they have achieved consistency and commitment throughout its lifetime.



Evaluation has demonstrated that host museums value the opportunity to work with larger institutions and to show a high class, professionally produced exhibition at little cost to themselves. As budgets become increasingly tight and community participation more urgent, this model of working looks ever more attractive. *Treasures from the Earth* came about because of the determination of the curators at Truro, Plymouth and Exeter. It is an exemplary project of how the expertise of the professional staff at these larger institutions can benefit museums and their

public much further down the line, creating a common sense of purpose and sharing expertise. It is essential to meet the challenges of staff cuts and budget reduction to ensure this winning formula continues in the post Renaissance landscape.

Vicky Dawson
Project Manager
Treasures from the Earth

Small Find – Big Impact?

One of the most, perhaps *the* most, unusual find of the half a million or so objects from the Danebury hillfort excavations (1969-1988) is a small meteorite. I say small and I mean small, as it's about the size of a walnut, weighing just 32 gm. By contrast, the Wold Cottage meteorite, which disturbed much of the population of Lincolnshire and Yorkshire with its sonic booms on 13 December 1795, before burying itself in a field near Wold Newton, tipped the scales at 25 kg!

The Danebury find was made in Pit 706, in August 1974, and the excavator must have popped it into the finds-tray thinking it was a little lump of slag. Its true identity was not widely known until 1990 when it was published in the meteoritic bulletin, but then it disappeared from the scene until Professor Colin and Dr Judith Pillinger determined to chase it up in 2009.



David Allen (right) suitably attired to enter the 'clean room' containing the Danebury meteorite

Eventually it reappeared (it was in Oxford) and the Pillingers gathered together all the information required for a proper meteoritic report. This even included a visit to Danebury to view the location (now all backfilled and healed over) and pay homage to Pit 706.



Danebury digging in the 1970s – The meteorite came from a small pit near the gaggle of people by the trees.

The immaculate (of course) dig records show that it was found in the middle layer of a three-layered fill, and that the layer in question was considered to be natural weathering. It looks most likely, therefore, that the tiny projectile fizzed its way into the pit without anyone being aware of it and hid there for 23 centuries.



The Danebury meteorite © Open University

The remarkable fact is that if the meteorite had fallen onto the ground surface it wouldn't have survived – its iron content would have seen it corrode away. Also, Professor Pillinger says that, statistically, there would be just one fall on an area the size of Danebury in a thousand years! And

although Danebury has 2500 excavated pits (so perhaps 5000 in total) only 10 or so would have been open at any one time - so all in all it was a remarkable shot. Verification of the find also comes in the C14 dating which shows that its skin was scorched in 350 BC – as good a Middle Iron Age 'entry' as you could wish for.

The meteorite – it's of the *ordinary chondrite* type, but I'll leave the finer classification to the experts, has been thin-sectioned and examined at the Open University. We are now at the stage when a small display can be put together for the Museum of the Iron Age in Andover and the object put on show. A regular occurrence at Andover Museum is of people bringing in pyrite nodules and asking 'Is this a meteorite?' Soon the staff will be able to tell them 'No, but there's one on show just through there. It may be small, but it's come an awful long way.'

David Allen

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Heading Home

Some 50 or 60 or maybe more years ago, a boy staying at Oak View Cottage, Portmore, Boldre, in the New Forest, found an interesting stone in an old quarry and pushed it home in a pram he found dumped there. The stone was in fact a 'Romano-British Cult Object', a horned head to be precise, and was reported in the *Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club* by Dr Anne Ross in 1969 (Vol 26, pp 57-59).

The stone is Bembridge limestone, which outcrops on the Isle of Wight, and the head weighs 29.3 kilos. Having flirted with the Hampshire County Museums Service (the article says it was delivered to Chilcomb House, Museums HQ) the head returned to private hands (I can only imagine the Museum was unwilling to take it on loan). It then travelled with the owners on their remove to Nottinghamshire and only 'came home' last year, when it was given to the University of Nottingham Museum with the instruction that it should be returned to the most appropriate place. I am grateful to Mrs Audrey Steer, the owner, for

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS AND EVENTS

proposing this and to Dr Lloyd Laing and Clare Pickersgill for getting in touch and arranging its return.

Claire Woodhead of the Arts & Museums Service, HCC, has now cleaned the head and it is already out on display. It features in our current 'Hampshire's Hidden Treasures' exhibits, and will visit each of our seven town museums in turn. Eventually it may take up longer-term residence among the Iron Age exhibits at Andover, or it could take a turn at Lymington, St Barbe Museum, or Lyndhurst.



The head is accessioned as A2010.83 and the image is a new photograph taken since it was cleaned.

There are not many new ideas about the cult of the horned head since Anne Ross's article but Prof Miranda Green suggests that heads (decapitated or fashioned) are associated with rituals involving boundaries and other liminal zones. 'Keep Out!' might well have been the message, but from who and to whom; did it sit and stare on the border of the Atrebatas with the Durotriges, which must have been somewhere in the locality?

David Allen
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What the SMA can do for you

In these current uncertain times it is worth remembering that the SMA acts as a lobbying group for members and exists to fight for museum archaeology in all its forms. The committee can lobby local authorities, submit questions to enquiries and respond to news stories both before and in response to decisions that affect your work place. If you find yourself in an uncertain situation, please contact the chairman or secretary who will action an official response from the Society.

Annual SMA Conference 2011

'Making an Impact: why museum archaeology matters'

Dates: 3rd - 4th November 2011
Venue: M-Shed, Bristol

The Society for Museum Archaeologists Annual Conference 2011 will take place at M-Shed, the new flagship museum for Bristol which opened in June. The exciting new galleries, situated in a revitalised 1950's transit shed on the city's historic wharf, will be thought-provoking and fun and this is an excellent opportunity to see the museum world's latest development at first hand.
<http://mshed.org/museum/>

This year's theme is **Making an impact: why museum archaeology matters**. We are lucky enough to have a range of speakers covering themes such as 'getting out of the office', 'how to make friends and influence people', and 'state of the nation'. For a full list of speakers see:
<http://www.socmusarch.org.uk/conf.htm>

Booking forms are available on the SMA website and should be returned with payment to:
Martha Lawrence
Buxton Museum & Art Gallery
Terrace Road, Buxton, Derbyshire, SK17 6DA
Tel: 01629 533543
email martha.lawrence@derbyshire.gov.uk

SMA Training Programme 2011

Archaeological Archives

Duncan Brown, English Heritage
M-Shed meeting room, Bristol
December 1, 10am - 3.45pm

This session aims to take an in depth look at the issues surrounding archaeological archives in museums, including the principles behind the archive creation, compilation and access.

FEE: £25 members, £30 non-members
For more details of courses and to book places please contact:

Elizabeth Royles, Grosvenor Museum
27 Grosvenor Street, Chester, CH1 2DD

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Back Numbers of 'The Museum Archaeologist'

A supply of back numbers of 'The Museum Archaeologist' is available. These will be of particular interest to anyone currently working towards becoming an associate member of The Museums Association as they contain a wealth of original papers written by leading museum archaeologists. For more information see the Society's website www.socmusarch.org.uk or contact Philip Wise via email at philip.wise@colchester.gov.uk.

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