

MUSEUM ARCHAEOLOGISTS

NEWS 39 Spring/Summer 2005
1975-2005 30th Anniversary Year

Contents

Editorial – Where now for Museum Archaeology?	1
Collections for the Future – The SMA Response	1
Towards a disposal strategy for archaeological animal bone Claire Thornton	5
Should Finds Liaison Officers actively solicit for museum acquisitions? Caroline McDonald	7
Archaeological Resource Centres: a review of the SMA/AAF Conference Philip J Wise	10
Museum Archaeology: Would you vote for it Mark Hall	13
Minutes of the 28th Annual General Meeting held on 5th November 2004 at York	15
Training Sessions 2005	17

Contributors to this issue:

Claire Thornton, Collections Manager, St Albans Museum Service
c.thornton@stalbans.gov.uk

Caroline McDonald, Essex Finds Liaison Officer,
caroline.mcdonald@colchester.gov.uk

Mark Hall, Human History officer, Perth Museum & Art Gallery
mahall@pkc.gov.uk

The deadline for contributions for the Summer/Autumn Newsletter is Friday 27 May 2005 and should be sent to Philip J Wise, Acting Newsletter Editor. Please send items either via email to philip.wise@colchester.gov.uk or on disk, accompanied by hard copy, to Philip J Wise, Colchester Museums Resource Centre, 14, Ryegate Road, Colchester, CO1 1YG.

Comments expressed in this Newsletter are not necessarily the views of the Society of Museum Archaeologists.

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

Editorial

WHERE NOW FOR MUSEUM ARCHAEOLOGY?

We live in interesting, but uncertain times. The recent, extremely disappointing, financial settlement for regional museums has shown how difficult it is to obtain the funding that is so desperately needed. This is a blow not just for the Hub Museums themselves, but also for those smaller museums that the hubs were supposedly empowered to help.

Yet this has happened against a background of increasing activity in the profession. The only good news for museum archaeology to come out of the financial settlement has been the commitment to fund the Portable Antiquities Scheme beyond the 31 March 2006 when the current HLF funding runs out. This is an opportunity which we should seize with both hands. The work of Finds Liaison Officers should be unashamedly used to demonstrate the relevance of archaeology in modern society. FLOs are now doing much of the outreach which we used to do and would like to do if it were not for the other pressures on our time.

Another area attracting attention is collections management. The Museums Association has recently raised the profile of collections in its *Collections for the Future* consultation. The SMA's detailed response is published in this issue of the Newsletter.

Also in this edition of the Newsletter is a review of the conference organised by

SMA and the Archaeological Archives Forum on archaeological resource centres. Although not a new idea, as regional repositories were previously mooted in the 1980s, this too has become a live issue in museums. The conference boasted both an impressive line-up of speakers and a large audience and many thought-provoking ideas were discussed. The SMA Committee will continue to promote a debate on resource centres in the next few months.

Two contributors, Claire Thornton and Caroline McDonald, have written personal essays on aspects of museum archaeology: 'Towards a disposal strategy for archaeological animal bone' and 'Should Finds Liaison Officers actively solicit for museum acquisitions?'

This issue concludes with a review by Mark Hall of the recent annual conference held in York and the Minutes of the 2004 Annual General Meeting.

The SMA is currently without a Newsletter Editor. Anyone wishing to take up this role is asked to contact the Secretary, Elizabeth Walker.

Finally, 2005 makes the thirtieth anniversary of the establishment of the Society. If any founder members would like to write about the early days of the SMA we would be interested to hear from them.

Philip J Wise
Acting Newsletter Editor

COLLECTIONS FOR THE FUTURE – THE SMA RESPONSE

In the Summer of 2004 the Museums Association launched a major enquiry into the future of the UK's museum and gallery collections. The MA wanted to make sure that more people have more

opportunities to engage with museum collections, and that those collections are as rich, diverse and inspiring as they can possibly be.

In its response the SMA welcomed the report as a long overdue airing of an important issue which affects all who work in or use museums.

General

A The SMA agrees that radical change is needed to ensure that the full potential of the UK's museum collections is realised.

B Our comments below demonstrate that some aspects of the MA's vision are too radical (another way of saying that they are misguided), while others may not be fully worked through.

C The examples of good practice in the UK are doubtless well known, but we would particularly like to mention the recent collaboration between Beamish and Tyne and Wear Museums to establish a new storage facility at Beamish. The MA should use its contacts with European and other world museum associations to obtain information on foreign case studies.

D The MA can ensure that museums remain sustainable in the future by re-establishing collecting and the preservation of cultural artefacts as an essential part of our society's cultural development, and ensuring that these are properly resourced.

1. Collaborations

1.1 The SMA broadly supports the establishment of a framework of subject networks. However, we would also like to see additional support given to those subject networks that already exist, and could serve as the basis for further development in this area. For example, the West Midlands Archaeological Collections Research Unit has been in existence since 1984 and has done much sterling work in researching and publishing information on archaeological collections held in the region. This regional model could be scaled up to a national level. We are aware that there is a current trend of producing regional, national and subject-specific research frameworks and strategies (for example, the 2001 publication by the Trust for Wessex Archaeology *Understanding the British Iron Age: An Agenda for Action*). Archaeological collecting needs to both inform and be informed by such initiatives.

1.2 In our view the priorities should be

what to collect and why particular artefacts or specimens should be collected. We would also like to see more interdisciplinary approaches across different types of collection to help reflect a more holistic view of past societies. It is also time to focus on **quality** not quantity in our archaeological collections; the key test should be how much information is locked up within a particular artefact. (For example in major Roman centres do we really need to keep large quantities of unprovenanced pottery if properly researched type series, like that held at Colchester, are in existence?)

1.3 We suggest that archaeological collections would be an excellent subject area for a pilot as:

1. There are very pressing and potentially damaging issues with regards to the problems of storage
2. We therefore need to demonstrate that collections are a resource and not a problem at local government level
3. There is a large body of expertise outside museums which could be drawn into collaborative projects
4. Innovative collaborative projects between local museums and Historic Environment Records would fit perfectly into recent government thinking (see, for example, the recent paper issued by DCMS).

1.4 The role of the centre can only be to give advice to individual museums. However, the two should not be in conflict as any centrally determined priorities should arise out of and be compatible with what the museum community has identified as being necessary. Individual museums have to retain the right to decide on their own priorities as they are best placed to determine what is in the best interests of the community or audience that they serve.

1.5 The key information resources are a body of well documented collections with standardised data, accessible via the internet as stand-alone sites or

through portals/gateways sites and nationally agreed strategies for collecting and research.

1.6 We believe that the strategic focus should be to locate collections which are of significance, but are under-used due to a lack of public awareness. Such collections can then receive additional resources to bring the standard of documentation up to a high level in the short to medium term rather than the long term. Attention should also be paid to improving the sharing of information between museums with as much detail as possible being provided.

1.7 In recent years the SMA has watched with growing alarm the steady erosion of archaeological collections expertise in museums. Posts have been deleted or specialist curators have been required to take on additional management duties. The situation has been compounded by a general decline in artefact studies. Many university undergraduate courses devote little or no time to this area and the MA is guilty of further weakening this aspect of museum work by dropping the requirement to pass a practical exam in order to become an associate member. In the short term it is unrealistic to expect an increase in curatorial posts, although this should be something that the Museums Association should be actively campaigning to achieve, and instead we have to attempt to make the expertise that currently exists more widely available. There are encouraging signs that this may be possible through the Regional Hubs.

1.8 Rather than the proposition that people in museums need different kinds of expertise, we need to be addressing the decline in connoisseurship. We are in danger of losing those traditional skills which characterised a museum curator – an affinity for and knowledge of objects. The time has come to attempt to reverse this trend and place much more emphasis on artefact skills through encouraging museum staff to attend training courses such as those run by the SMA.

1.9 The most effective strategy that can be adopted to ensure that museums have better access to external expertise is to actively encourage the regional hubs to give due weight to the provision of peripatetic collections specialists. There is a real danger that the hubs will only focus on education and outreach, which, while very worthy areas of endeavour, should not be undertaken at the expense of collection-based activities.

2. Clarifying the use of museum collections

2.1 We agree that it would be very helpful to have a nationally recognised network of reference collections, but, as in 1.1 above, we would also like to see additional support given to those reference collections that already exist, and could serve as the basis for further development in this area. For example, there is an internationally important post-medieval pottery reference collection in the Potteries Museums, Stoke-on-Trent and similar collections of medieval pottery in the British Museum and the National Museums of Scotland. As so often in museums however, these reference collections rely on a few knowledgeable individuals to maintain and access them. (We might add in passing that the Potteries Museum severely reduced its curatorial staff in the last few years.)

2.2 We do not agree with this proposal as it seems to be predicated on the idea that museums have chosen to under use parts of their collections rather than be forced to do so through lack of resources and staff. We do not agree with the logic that says as museums are not presently resourced to deal with all their collections that they should dispose of them. This fails to recognise both the long-term role of preservation through a collection and that a museum can never display all of its collection. Any object in store can be seen by a member of the public; how quickly and informatively this can be done depends on the level of staffing and other resources. Rather the issue here is

ensuring that the collections or objects in public ownership are held and displayed in the most appropriate place. To give two examples: Ipswich Museum has on display a collection of items from Kent's Cavern which have no relevance to the people of Ipswich but would have immensely greater value if re-united with other material from the site held in Torquay Museum. Likewise Birmingham Museum has a number of Anglo-Saxon cemetery finds from Suffolk which should be sent back to that county as they will probably never be displayed in Birmingham and a researcher would be most unlikely to discover that they exist in Birmingham. In other words what we should be addressing now is the issue of rationalisation of collections whilst retaining them within public ownership.

2.3 It is important to distinguish between these two activities. Open storage has been around in one form or another for many years and, for certain classes of material, can be very effective. The archaeological museum in Cologne, for example, has all its Roman lamps displayed together in a thematic manner. We would argue that open storage is a tried and trusted technique. By contrast digitisation is very recent. Many museums have received lottery or other funding to digitise their collections and make them accessible via the Internet. For example Colchester Museums have received funding from the Designation Challenge Fund to digitise its archaeology collections. Now is an appropriate time to evaluate what has been achieved and ask questions such as who uses these resources and why.

3. More ambitious and better targeted collecting

3.1 No comment. In passing we do wonder whether we should really be worrying if future museum users will be 'excited' by particular collections.

3.2 Museum archaeologists have a proven track record in capturing contextual information, but the

negative effect of commercial pressures in contract archaeology and the still prevalent perception that museums are only interested in objects and not their associated information are still problems. It is now becoming essential that archaeological collections are linked to Historic Environment Records (HERs), which in the future will hold digital reports and archives, including images, and can place a collection within its geographical and academic context. Such aspirations will only be achieved by an increase in staff resources both in museum documentation and the HERs themselves.

3.3 We are strongly opposed to the idea of holding collections. The disadvantages of this proposal include the short term costs of storing material which may subsequently be discarded and the abdication of responsibility for making curatorial decisions at the point of entry into the museum, leading to a potentially huge problem for the future. Even for developer-funded excavations under the terms of PPG16, which potentially generate much material not suitable for accession into a museum collection, the only responsible approach is to make decisions on retention at the earliest possible opportunity (and, of course, follow the SMA's *Guideline on the Selection, Retention and Dispersal of Archaeological Collections*). There may also be legal implications stemming from the creation of holding collections.

3.4 The prime basis on which museums collect has to be that of knowledge of objects and collections. So the decision, or perhaps recommendation, to collect has to be made by curators, although museum governing bodies, Friends groups and visitors all have a legitimate role in supporting the process, especially when large purchase sums are involved. It is also worth stressing that all registered museums will have a collecting policy which will have been approved and adopted by the governing body.

4.0 Beyond the Museum

4.1 As far as we are aware museums have always had an advisory role in the preservation of material culture outside the museum. This role should certainly continue as it provides mutually beneficial links between museums and individuals or organisations, as well as being for the public good generally.

4.2 We are concerned by the thinking behind this question. We believe that museums must continue to give priority to their own collections, which lie within the public realm, rather than becoming too focused on private collections. Even so it may be argued that we should be working harder to encourage private collectors to transfer their collections to public museums sooner rather than later and, where possible, provide endowments for their conservation and presentation. Central government should be lobbied to give substantial tax incentives to collectors who act in this way. It is reasonable to draw an analogy between archaeologists and metal detectorists and curators and collectors. There is no doubt that relations between archaeologists and detectorists have improved over the last decade. However, it should be remembered that the Portable Antiquities Scheme is primarily about recording data on chance finds of archaeological objects, encouraging greater public involvement in archaeology and promoting best practice, particularly amongst metal detectorists. The issue of the future of the large number of private collections formed by metal detectorists, some of which are substantial and potentially of considerable archaeological importance, remains unresolved.

4.3 We see no value in removing objects from public collections and giving them to private collectors as we do not see how this can improve their accessibility or conservation. Most local archaeological societies do not have their own premises, which rather begs the question where would these ex-museum collections be displayed and how would they be curated. We are

surely not suggesting the creation of more under-resourced museums?

We hope that the above comments make a valuable contribution to the ongoing debate on this important subject and would be happy to continue to contribute as appropriate.

TOWARDS A DISPOSAL STRATEGY FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL ANIMAL BONE

Claire Thornton

As part of my MA in Museum Studies in 1999 at UCL I looked at the issue of archaeological animal bone in museum collections. I felt that I was in a good position to do this as my archaeological area of expertise is in zoo-archaeology. I did the research and then put it to one side as my work commitments increased. However, I was recently reminded of the national scale of the problem at the Archaeological Archives day and at the SMA conference. I write this as both a taster and as a way of sparking off more discussion and thought about the issue.

The history of archaeological animal bones in museums is influenced both by trends in museum practice and developments in zoo-archaeology. The majority of archaeological animal bone has been collected since the rescue days of the 1970s; as a result my brief survey suggested that archaeological animal bone was not the largest class of bulk find in many of our longer established museums. When I looked at the collections of the ARC, where all the collections in the archive have been collected over the same time period, the archaeological bone outweighs the pot by (at the time) nearly 50 cubic centimetres. It seems that given time, collecting and storing the material, as we are at current levels, archaeological animal bone could be the biggest bulk archive in many museums.

Presently in the majority of UK museums all of the animal bone

submitted for inclusion into an archaeological archive is retained without question of its actual value for the zoo-archaeologist. However there are a number of factors that relate to the usefulness of the assemblage, and a selection are listed below:

Methods of Recovery

Whether collected by hand or sieved can have a major influence on economic analyses of the assemblage. If the smaller animals are considered the most important area of study for the particular assemblage, then it is unlikely that they will be present in significant numbers prior to 1975 when an influential study was published.

Type of Deposit and Resultant Conservation Status

Bones recovered from fairly acidic soil conditions may have suffered from 'etching' with the removal of any useful pathologies or cut marks. As a result analysis of the assemblage may not be as expensive as you think!

Waterlogged bone that has been dried out under direct sunlight may warp and crack too much to be identifiable and poor handling and washing can have a similar affect. It is worth considering these factors when looking at your collections.

Biased Collecting

This is a major problem, for many zoo-archaeologists have encountered 'useless' assemblages with disproportionate numbers of magnificent finds created through discriminatory collecting by field staff. Warning bells should start ringing if your boxes are full of magnificent complete specimens and there are no small fragmentary pieces and it may be worthwhile contacting a specialist.

Other factors include the age of the deposit, the provenance of the deposit and the fragmentary status of the material and any previous disposal or rationalisations that have taken place.

Suggestions for Rationalisation

Rationalisation is a difficult area and the

strategy needs to be verified by all those involved in the archaeological archive. I would advocate that all rationalisation is undertaken with the assistance of a specialist.

It is best to tackle the problem at its root and insist that all archaeological units depositing archives with the museum impose at the least the following strategy before and during study: *Unidentifiable bone should be disposed of after the assessment level of counting and weighing.* The zoo-archaeologist could also dispose of the bone that stratigraphic analysis suggests should not be studied in greater depth – for example, contexts with multi-phase pottery (Peter Liddle pers com 1999).

It should also be noted that the unstratified or unprovenanced bone should be disposed of following the SMA *Selection and Retention Guidelines* 1993.

Properly organised packing of the archive, following these disposals should prevent there from being too much wasted space in boxes. It is important to bear in mind the fact that enormous amounts of damage could be caused to bones, and therefore potential research on areas such as butchery and pathology, through abrasion caused by placing too many bones in a densely packed container.

If storage of archaeological animal bone is considered by the specialist the most appropriate way of preserving the archaeological resource for future study then it should be stored without question.

In the Museum

What about the archives already in the museum? I would advocate seeking the assistance of a specialist prior to the disposal of any material. However, I think that if space and money is desperate there are a few fairly easy strategies to take:

- Dispose of unprovenanced and unstratified bones.

- Repackage material by context.
- Advertise the material for study.
- Consider disposal of bone that has been thoroughly studied and published. Will it be looked at again? How many people have asked to look at it since publication? How worthwhile does the zoo-archaeologist think it is to store it? How well respected is the work of the individual who studied the bone within the zoo-archaeological community?
- Apply for funding for specialist help to assess the collection in particular considering how appropriate it would actually be for academic research and study. If you can determine that it would not be very useful considering some of the taphonomic factors I listed above, you may be able to dispose of it!

How can the museum ease study of the assemblage for researchers?

- Make sure that the bone received and stored is kept thoroughly dry as 'pin-mould' resulting from damp storage can seriously hinder study.
- The bones should be stored by context and if possible, by species (unlikely unless a specialist is available).
- The establishment of a list of the collections of animal bones which each museum holds (which is regularly updated) would be invaluable as it is extremely difficult as a researcher to find out which museum stores a specific assemblage. The information could be published in the Association for Environmental Archaeology web pages, or some of the more specialist zoo-archaeological websites.

I hope that this short paper highlights some of the issues to consider with archaeological animal bones, they are an important, fascinating and valuable resource and no decision to dispose of them should be taken lightly. If anyone wants to join me in a working group around this issue please contact me.

SHOULD FINDS LIAISON OFFICERS ACTIVELY SOLICIT FOR MUSEUM ACQUISITIONS?

Caroline McDonald

Introduction

Thirteen percent of all finds recorded on the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) database now reside in museums. Of the 36 Finds Liaison Officers (FLOs) working across England and Wales, 24 are based in, or spend half their time at a museum (the remainder are to be found in county council heritage units). It is my opinion that working with small finds in a museum environment must affect an individual's outlook on objects. The preparation of this paper involved canvassing FLOs for their personal opinions, based on their own circumstances and experiences to date. This paper will inevitably raise questions that will not necessarily be answered here, but are open to debate.

First, here is a reminder of the key aims of the PAS:

- To advance knowledge of the history and archaeology of England and Wales by systematically recording archaeological objects found by the public.
- To raise awareness among the public of the educational value of archaeological finds in their context and to facilitate research in them.
- To increase opportunities for active public involvement in archaeology and strengthen links between metal detector users and archaeologists.
- To encourage all those who find archaeological objects to make them available for recording and to promote best practice by finders.

The view from the frontline

There have been a number of museum acquisitions in Essex museums through a finder's contact with the FLO. Colchester Museums have benefited in

particular; recent acquisitions include unsolicited donations from their finders of a fifth-century button brooch, a seventh-century saucer brooch and a tenth-century Anglo-Scandinavian sword pommel. Colchester was delighted to receive these finds as the Saxons are underrepresented in the collections.

An exceptional find made in Suffolk, but reported in Essex, was a mid-first-century AD handle in the form of Minerva, clearly made by a native Briton. It became apparent from a conversation with the finder that Minerva was going to be offered for sale and that significant offers had already been made from dealers and from abroad. I suggested to the finder that he should consider the local museum as a potential buyer, and this is indeed where the handle ended up.

All of these cases were 'clear cut' – even with Minerva as she was due to be sold regardless. However, a rare Bronze Age arrowhead made of copper alloy was more difficult. This was the first such arrowhead recorded from Essex (a handful are known from Suffolk and Norfolk). I recorded the item for the finder and told him about the findings of my research and how rare this object was. I encouraged him to consider its 'future'. The local museum curator had been aware of the find, but not necessarily of what it represented. I suggested to the curator that they might like to liaise with the finder.

This case raises the question of to whom I owe my duty of care – the finder or the museum? In response to this I like to think of myself as a mediator. I try to ensure that negotiations have occurred between the finder and curator, whilst maintaining a distance from the museum's collecting policy.

This role of mediator is a common stance adopted by many FLOs. Independence is an important issue,

especially when we deal with a number of institutions across a county. It is, however, hard not to be seen as part of one's host institution. Some metal detectorists (the majority of finders) are suspicious of museums, so the FLO's neutrality is important.

How active is 'actively'?

There are a number of strategies employed. More than one FLO said that they would give the finder the museum contact and leave it up to them. Others will keep out of the negotiation by informing the museum first and THEN telling the finder they may be approached. Again, who is the duty of care to, who gets the first courtesy?

In an ideal situation I think that the finder should always lead the process. However, some examples are exceptional and some FLOs have had no qualms about strongly soliciting for finds. For example, one concerned FLO persuaded the finder of a second-century grave group, consisting of a cremation with bronze vessels and an amphora, to donate the entire collection. Another case concerned the discovery in a garden of an Anglo-Saxon sword, which formed part of a sixth-century burial. In both cases the fragile state of the artefacts influenced the FLO's decision to make overt suggestions to the finders and the potential cost of conservation to the finders ultimately influenced the donation.

Some FLOs feel that actively soliciting is acceptable, provided a financial incentive is always offered by the museum in question. This happens in one northern county, which has seen many objects coming into the public collections, including an Iron Age terret and a late Roman pewter hoard. Finders may be swayed by the fact that museums will offer a fair market value, as opposed to having to negotiate with dealers. Sometimes a sale is clearly on the agenda (as with Minerva), so some FLOs feel that suggesting a sale to a museum is acceptable.

Other issues

Can museums afford the costs of saving these objects for public collections? Do they have the storage and conservation resources required? Some museums clearly do not. One FLO, on seeing something they think should be in a public collection, can only suggest donation and offer no financial incentive. But is this kind of 'moral' pressure as acceptable? One museum requires that the FLO do associated paperwork for donations through PAS. With already enough work, there is little incentive for this FLO to 'solicit'. Most FLOs are of the opinion that it is acceptable to solicit if no pressure is applied. But surely an initial request IS implied pressure? To most finders FLOs represent 'the archaeological establishment' with some implied influence.

Potential problems

One FLO pursued a donation by a finder to what they considered a not unreasonable point. This resulted in them being pilloried on the Internet for putting undue pressure on finders. Out of 700 objects that year, they had only approached four finders for donation. We must be aware that not everyone will accept the suggestion. This finder felt a line had been crossed.

The 'Line'.

This is a tricky issue and, in my view, the line moves depending on how well you know the finder and the circumstances surrounding the future of the object. But some FLOs will not risk crossing that line by simply not getting involved. One FLO stands by the PAS statement that we do not take objects from finders, as they feel there is no room for interpretation. Certainly the PAS leaflet contains a clear statement that museum acquisition is a different procedure and does not mention FLOs being involved.

Wider issues

Can a finder prove legal title? Should museums actively check that the landowner is aware of a future transaction, as it implies on the PAS

leaflet? Is this really happening? My view is that as a mediator, that is the duty of the curators!

If finds are not put on display or not put on display quickly enough, then FLOs often receive the brunt of grumbles from finders, who may not understand how museum collections work. Many museums will turn down entire metal-detected collections, but want the 'nice' stuff, and this can be seen as sending a mixed message. Should museums make their collecting policies more publicly available? This is not to compile a shopping list, but so that the public can understand what areas of a collection they might wish to contribute to, and why the museum collects what it does. This might be of benefit, for instance, where a museum is trying to collect a type series of coins.

PAS review

Some museums clearly feel they are not benefiting from the PAS. In a recent review of the Scheme, one museum worker said 'There should be better co-operation between FLOs and local museums. Unless I ask a specific question I receive no information about finds from the museum's collection area being reported directly to the FLO'. Despite the fact that PAS data is available to curators on-line, this illustrates a clear concern about the 'collecting' area and one to one communications with the FLO regarding collecting.

Conclusions

We must be careful about *actively* soliciting finds. One FLO will mention the possibility of acquisition to a finder once and then never again. At the other extreme one museum does indeed have a 'shopping list' and asks the FLO to actively solicit for Neolithic polished axes from their collecting area. Behaviour like this could lead to criticism and the PAS has received some flak from a non-museum archaeologist who insists that the Scheme exists purely to enhance museum collections.

Where does this leave us? Should FLOs actively solicit for museum acquisitions? If we stand by our mission statement then the answer is no. The view from the PAS is that our primary function is to **record** archaeological objects. We don't want to see 'active soliciting' becoming part of our perceived aims as this would be detrimental. Museums must be more 'active' in using the database to watch what objects are passing through their collecting areas and perhaps be more direct in contacting finders, if they truly believe an object should be in the public domain. But the FLO is their liaison too, which returns us to the question of to whom do we have our first duty? This ultimately leaves FLOs like me in a strange place. I love archaeology, I love objects and I love museums. Perhaps the ultimate question is should I have let that Bronze Age arrowhead go?

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCE CENTRES: A REVIEW OF THE SMA/AAF CONFERENCE

Philip J Wise

On 27 October 2004 the Museum of London hosted a one-day conference on archaeological resource centres jointly arranged by the SMA and the Archaeological Archives Forum (AAF). An impressive list of eminent speakers considered a variety of aspects of this very topical issue, commencing with Simon Thurley, the chief executive of English Heritage.

Dr Thurley opened his remarks by stating that, 'The whole issue of looking after the historic environment is facing a series of major changes'. Of these perhaps the most fundamental is the move away from protecting the historic environment to the management of change in that environment. As part of this management there is a clear recognition on the part of EH that it is the **quality** and not the quantity of archaeological data that really matters. In the realm of archive management

this means that we need to make greater use of sampling strategies and disposals, and pursue the creation of archaeological resource centres.

The next speaker, Nick Merriman of UCL provided an historical overview of the issue, noting that as early as 1904 Flinders Petrie was recognising, 'the need for the national repository for archaeology in England'. There was little attention given to archives before the 1970s however, with in 1978, for example, the Dimbleby Report stating that, 'ideally no excavation should take place until arrangements for the adequate future storage, conservation and maintenance of the archive has been made'. More recently opportunities have been missed to enshrine this principle into archaeological project management with both PPG 16 and MAP 2 being silent on the subject of archives. Only in 2002 was a general consensus achieved about the nature of the problem with the establishment of the AAF to consider the deposition, documentation and accessibility of archives.

Cathy Perrin from English Heritage stated that, following two major surveys, her organisation had concluded that there were huge quantities of often poorly prepared archives destined for museums unable or not resourced enough to receive them. It was to be regretted that the SMA's *Selection, Retention and Disposal* document was largely ignored by field practitioners as it was seen to be for museum archaeologists. The Archaeological Archives Forum had recognised a series of major concerns including the quality of data. Archaeologists must make decisions about what should be kept otherwise these will be made for us as the costs of storage become unacceptably high. It was also recognised that it was frequently difficult to obtain title to archives as there was a lack of a sound legal framework. Perrin made several suggestions as to how we might change things in the future:

- Increased collaborative working National guidelines on selection procedures based on sound research criteria.
- The establishment of a legal framework for copyright and intellectual ownership.
- The preparation of standards for archiving and deposition policies and for temporary archive storage.
- An increase in training in archive processes.
- A concerted effort to influence government policy.

Ken Smith from the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers (ALGAO) picked up on Perrin's final point by noting that the importance of the historic environment is being increasingly recognised by various government departments, for example, Defra through its Countryside Stewardship Scheme. Smith explained that currently public access to historic environment record (HER) data is limited and hence ALGAO is working with EH to create a portal. He cited the Sheffield Galleries & Museums Trust website, www.idigsheffield.org.uk, as an example of good practice. In his view the majority of people relate directly to their immediate locality and therefore we should not lose sight of communities in our aspirations for HER data.

Speaking on behalf of MLA, David Dawson said that the key issues related to documentation backlogs and the identification of issues encouraging or preventing collaborative collection development. *Renaissance in the Regions* has presented an opportunity to re-invent regional museums, which can now set their own priorities within the overall framework. The proposed subject specialist networks could collaborate in managing collections such as investigating joint storage arrangements. MLA approved of resource centres and would support those wanting to develop them. The Designation Challenge Fund or Renaissance Hub monies could be used to fund the development of resource

centres, which could house museums, finds liaison officers and HERs, and hence become a powerful education resource.

Val Bott urged delegates to make sure that they knew how much storage costs because this knowledge gives protection against budgetary cuts. She noted that archives can be under threat of disposal because these cost local authorities money without any return. Bott spoke of 'the pain of local patriotism' as collections are moved to county or regional depositories. This pain could be countered by stressing the benefits of better access for educational activities. The HLF were interested in regional resource centres and some grant applications had already been received. More research was required and a realistic look should be taken at the costs of existing storage.

In the ensuing discussion a number of delegates raised issues arising from the morning's papers. Ed Southworth (Lancashire County Museums) warned of the danger of creating a new repository which would bring with it additional costs such as those associated with specialist staff, clerical staff and marketing. In his view topping up existing centres may be more sustainable than creating new facilities. Quentin Carroll (Cambridgeshire County Council) agreed, citing the Cambridgeshire experience of creating a joint facility for the record office, museum store and archaeology service where the building costs were enormous. Carolyn Wingfield (Saffron Walden Museum) noted that the public may not be able to or may not want to travel long distances to resource centres. She highlighted the case of adult education evening classes held in a museum where, at present, the tutor has direct access to the stored collections. In her view location should be looked at very carefully as local solutions could be best. On a different theme Nick Merriman was concerned about the acceptance of a continual growth in

archives on the grounds that posterity never comes. Sustainability must be our watch word and there must be a finite area for storage. We must decide what to take and what to reject. Val Bott highlighted the shortage of archives expertise as a large volume of material is held by museums with no specialist curators.

The afternoon session opened with Andrew Jones from the Archaeological Resource Centre (ARC) in York. Dr Jones explained that the ARC had been originally established to solve problems of storage and research space with its education and access roles only added later. In 1990 the potential audiences were identified as families, schools, interested adults and archaeologists. The experience of operating the ARC indicated that substantial marketing was required to keep family numbers up, that it was important to establish links with individual teachers and that in the case of interested adults and archaeologists it was hard and very hard to persuade them to visit. The York Archaeological Trust, the operators of the ARC, recognised that the requirement was for a facility which responded to public demand rather than idealistic concerns. A holistic approach had not worked in York. The nature of archaeological materials makes these inaccessible to many people and curatorial procedures may be difficult to understand. The Trust had therefore separated storage from access, moving the storage function out to cheaper premises.

The next speaker, Julian Richards spoke of the challenge of the 'digital revolution' with more and more data becoming available. But there was also an opportunity to create joined-up access to archives, as it does not matter where the digital data is physically held, provided it is maintained and accessible. Increasingly digital archives are being used; Richards cited the example of the Eynsham digital archive which saw 34,216 downloads in the period from 1 August to 15 October 2004. He raised

the questions: How do we preserve digital data? Where should it be preserved? and How do we find it? The answers are to develop protocols for backup and migration, establish a network of 'trusted digital repositories (the equivalent of registered museums) and use web portals such as the ADS and HEIRPORT.

A second case study was presented by John Shepherd, who described the creation of the London Archaeological Research Centre, or LARC. Shepherd stated that there were six pre-conditions:

- Need to house current material.
- Need for expansion space.
- Need to set deposition standards.
- Need to agree collections policy.
- Need to guarantee access.
- Need to secure long-term funding.

He described how re-boxing the collections had created seven years of expansion space while rationalising had given a further eight years. Work was continuing on the development of reference, type and fabric series.

Gustav Milne argued that the prime reason for keeping archives is research. He described three related projects involving nine universities and £750,000 which seek to materially change the way that archaeology is taught in universities. There is to be a change in focus from excavation to post-excavation studies. The new courses will study museum collections, old archives and historic environment records. This will clearly have an impact on museums as more students use their resources. The solution lies in jointly funded posts between universities and museums which could look to the HEFC for financial support.

The final speaker, David Miles, described the vital role that archives play in a wide range of research projects including those investigating including human skeletal remains, lipids on ancient pottery, the salt trade and pottery and stone sourcing.

In his summing up Hedley Swain suggested that archaeological resource

centres cannot be imposed from the top down and were not of a pre-determined size (for example, a county). They could, however, form part of a holistic approach which tackled the fragmentation of the archaeological world, and, though never a major visitor attraction, could be an excellent management tool.

MUSEUM ARCHAEOLOGY: WOULD YOU VOTE FOR IT

Mark Hall

The Society's 2004 annual conference was held in York, the third time we have been welcomed there for our conference. As on our prior visits we were warmly hosted by the Yorkshire Museum, this time in the guise of the York Museums Trust, who has taken over its running from the local authority. A wide-ranging conference kicked-off on Thursday afternoon with a session on new initiatives; all in their way eloquent demonstrations that archaeology has been voted for and that when it is voted for it can deliver exciting and accessible results. Thus we heard from Thomas Cadbury about the new displays in Lincoln (part of a £12m plus new development) and from Peter Robinson about new displays in Doncaster followed by Martin Allfrey's up-date on how English Heritage is developing its care and display of collections and Andrew Morrison's vision for future display and access initiatives for the Yorkshire Museum. I was not entirely persuaded of the merits of the so-called 'Ikea Idea'; open-storage is neither new nor an easy solution and Ikea is not open storage in the way it would need to work for a museum. It was much easier though, to warm to Andrew's clear enthusiasm and commitment to improve access. The session was rounded off by Steve Roskams' presentation on the ground-breaking integration of the archaeological data held in Yorkshire's SMRs, museums and archaeological units. The project still has a long way to go but it is now

taking a concrete shape and holds out the prospect of high impacts on both the formulation of research frameworks and universal access to archaeological data. The day was rounded off by a splendid buffet and wine reception hosted by the York Museums Trust, preceded by a key-note address from Peter Addyman, who took us on an insightful, sardonic journey through the last forty years of archaeology as practised in York.

Day two (Friday) commenced with a session on social inclusion, comprising papers on the Young Archaeologists Club (Alison Bodley), the Creswell Crags Heritage Trust (Nigel Mills and John Scott), Hindu finds from the river Thames (Nikola Burdon) and the Portable Antiquities Scheme (Ceinwen Paynton). YAC clearly continues to perform strongly and to give kids from all backgrounds (but mainly the more self-included) an engagement with their archaeological past. It does though need careful handling to ensure it does not become a 'Politics of Exclusion' football. The Creswell Crags team have clearly secured themselves a vital place in the social infrastructure of their local communities with their flexible and open approach to the needs and aspirations of those communities though sometimes this seemed to result in a fuzzy focus with respect to the archaeology (though perhaps not one noticeable to communities on the ground), perhaps in part dictated by financial-hoop jumping. One point that I did take issue with was that of seeing museums as a place of last resort rather than of living archaeology. The Hindu finds paper reported on a project still in its early phases and with more work to do in confirming and building upon the Hindu linkages it discussed. It raised some interesting questions about the interface of social inclusion and archaeology. Hindus seemed to be presented as a cultural and ethnic homogeneity that is socially excluded. Is Hinduism an ethnic identity? Is it not more likely that certain social groupings within the communities that practice Hinduism are socially excluded? Can

recovering finds from the river Thames be forced to address this particularly if it comes up against practices that in part seek personal privacy? One way in which such material could be used to address broader social inclusion is by linking it to the millennia-old practice of the use of the river Thames as a sacred, ritualised river (sometimes dreadfully so as with the still unsolved ritual slaying of an unknown Nigerian boy several years ago). My disquiet about social inclusion was brought to the boil by what seemed a major piece of Revisionism in the PAS presentation. That this scheme is crucially important to British archaeology and public involvement in it is of course a given. But its funding bind meant that it had to be very on-message with New Labour speak and so the landscape of British archaeology was retrospectively repopulated with a legion of metal-detector wielding saints, their tools the symbols of their martyrdom at the hands of ruthlessly uncaring museums. I had not realised how much pressure there was on the PAS to become back-door social workers, where the bruised egos of metal-detectorists could be assuaged whilst allowing them to hold on to the majority of 'their' objects as private property. The PAS scheme could be a true gateway to social inclusion if it was strengthened so that more objects could become public, community property, in museums where all could access them.

The second session of the morning dealt with the perennial favourite – human remains – with a paper from Alison Sheridan explaining recent NMS-led initiatives with respect to human remains in Scottish archaeology (demonstrating the vital contribution such work and such material can make to our understanding of our past) and a paper from Joseph Elders on the wise and refreshing approach to human remains being adopted by the Church of England. Its guidelines are due out early in 2005 and will hopefully allow the ill-considered licensing scheme proposed by the DCMS to be given more thought.

The formal side of the conference concluded with an afternoon session on aspects of the political agenda affecting museum archaeology. Alexandra Irving spoke about the BM's work in Iraq and Sudan – all of it highly commendable and impressive and clearly enacted by highly dedicated individuals. However it was presented with no detectable sense of irony about that institution's role in the continuum of imperial adventures in the Middle East and the Mediterranean and the collections that have accrued from it. Loan exhibitions to both Iraq and Sudan would be one possible way to aid the social reconstruction process. David Crowther spoke on behalf of MLA and gave us a review of how things look with respect to *Renaissance* and its chronic under-funding and how the future might develop. There was the inevitable Government-fuelled rhetoric but David importantly reminded us that to have any chance of getting the additional resources needed museums need to gather more and more evidence of impacts and outcomes. This might be easier to do if museums were not under a constant pressure to modernise – though no one seems able to explain exactly what they mean by this – or if Governments did not treat us like Sisyphus, sentenced to heave our boulders of evidence to the top of the mountain only for them to push it back down for us to start again. If we were given the resources to do what we do best – and the whole sector would only require a fraction of that which has been wasted on Lottery-funded farrago's (not just the Millennium Dome) and new Parliament buildings – then the results would be there in profusion. The entertainment continued with the next speaker, the MA's court jester, Maurice Davies, who more than ably demonstrated that the MA has a less than secure grip on museum archaeology and the issues affecting it. Life is, of course, full of paradoxes, so there should have been no surprise at being presented with a living example, someone who freely admits to knowing nothing of archaeology but who feels able to tell

its practitioners what is wrong with it and how it should be delivered. Maurice kindly opened our eyes to the real world where museums have never had so much money to play with and where the MA does not feel the need to know about the particularities of museum archaeology (or any other discipline) because it is a broadly representative body which means it does not have to understand the constituent elements of the profession. This, of course, makes the MA perfectly suited to issue such misguided documents as *Collecting for the Future*.

The actual real political world was the subject of the final two papers, by Tim Schadla-Hall and by Mike Heyworth. Tim catalogued several case studies around key pieces of heritage legislation/cultural policy to demonstrate that change in the real world is contingent on individuals knowing how to operate the system; to quote the age-old aphorism, *it is not what you know but who you know*, so rather than comply with the rhetoric of evidence collection only to have it rolled back down the hill we need to become more astute political operators. This chimed well with Lord Redesdale's comments at the Cardiff Conference last year but where do we get the additional labour so that the lobbying, like the evidence collection, does not simply diminish further the real work that needs to be done and which archaeologists want to do. Mike Heyworth, the new director of the CBA gave us an assessment of how future progress might be made, again not by towing the Government rhetoric-line nor by massive organisational change but by the greater and improved co-operation of existing organisations.

Informally the conference continued with a wine reception hosted by the CBA at their new headquarters in York: St Mary's House, 66 Bootham. This was followed by the conference dinner where we demonstrated our social inclusion credentials by interacting with a hen-party and sharing with the world our tribute to our then absent

chairman, with the creation of a new cocktail, *The Hedley Swain*: champagne, *Cointreau*, peach brandy and a sugar cube soaked in bitters. Things were drawn to a close on Saturday morning with a tour of the newly refurbished Jorvik Viking Centre (totally redesigned and more flexible cars, a newly built street with new smells, but the same basic idea and the same fundamentally under-interpreted real objects, despite the excellent use of Pepper's Ghosts) and then of the undercroft of York Minster (giving fabulous if under-resourced archaeological snap-shots of York's Roman, Anglo-Scandinavian and Medieval past).

MINUTES OF THE 28TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON 5th NOVEMBER 2004 AT YORK

Forty Members were in attendance

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Amanda Loaring, Mark Davies, Jennifer Blackford, David Kendrick and Julia Habershaw.

2. Minutes of the 27th Annual General Meeting

In the Vice-Chair's report it was noted that the sum of money remaining in the accounts from the MGC grant should read £6,000 not £2,000. This was corrected and the minutes approved and signed as a correct record of the meeting.

3. Matters Arising

No matters were discussed.

4.1 Hon. Chair's Report

The Chair thanked the York Museums Trust for hosting the conference and AGM. He then offered his thanks to his colleagues on the SMA committee, especially Amanda Loaring who has transformed the Society's membership records in the time she has been on the committee.

The Chair explained the close link the Society has with the Archaeological Archives Forum through his role as Chair of both. The Society's role over the year has led to the completion of a mapping project looking at museum collecting areas across England. Duncan Brown is currently preparing national guidance notes for archaeological archives and the AAF has prepared disaster management procedures that have been published by the IFA.

The Society has commented upon the Museums Association's report *Collections for the Future* and continues to play a role on the advisory board of the Portable Antiquities Scheme.

The Vice-Chair was invited to give a report. He summarised his role as the Society's representative on both the Portable Antiquities Scheme Advisory Board and the CBA Portable Antiquities Working Group. The Society has also recently been invited to comment on a document prepared by the English Heritage's Portable Antiquities Working Group.

The Chair reported that the Society has been talking to IFA about collecting areas and the Society has held a discussion with Channel 4 to raise concerns about any future plans for another 'Big Dig'. A meeting has also been held with the BBC about their planned series 'The First Britons'.

A day meeting in London at the end of October and hosted jointly with the Archaeological Archives Forum on Archaeological Resource Centres proved very successful with 140 people attending. An email database is now available and will be used to progress the discussions and work further.

The Society's committee are currently developing an idea to celebrate museum archaeology in the UK with publication of a book and website. The creation of subject specialist networks by MLA may also provide an opportunity for the Society to play a

new role and it will seek to become the group that links all institutions holding archaeological collections together. The membership will all be invited to become involved with this project at an appropriate stage.

4.2 Hon. Secretary's Report

The Secretary reported that she had used her first year in office to sort out the membership of the committee. She acknowledged the success of holding the AGM within the annual conference and proposed that this should continue.

Mary Kershaw was thanked for hosting the conference in York and Andrew Morrison and Jane Nichols of the York Museums Trust also thanked for their contributions to the event.

5. Hon. Editor's Report

The Editor reported that the last of the Carlisle conference papers and the Colchester conference proceedings have recently been published and distributed to all members. The Cardiff conference proceedings are progressing well with only a few papers now outstanding. It is hoped that these will be published early in 2005.

Letters have already been sent to all the speakers attending the York conference inviting them to prepare their contributions for publication.

6. Hon. Training Officers Reports

Thomas Cadbury reported on the year's training events, thanking Tim Bridges for co-ordinating these. The year saw Alex Lang of the Shotton Palaeolithic project lead a joint meeting with IFA at the University of Birmingham 'recognising and understanding the Palaeolithic'. Twenty people attended. The Prehistoric pottery seminar had to be cancelled due to the leader's ill health but it is hoped that this can be rescheduled for the future. In May, Karen Wardley and Duncan Brown led and hosted an excellent seminar on Saxon small finds in Southampton attended by 7 people. In June, Elizabeth Walker held a day on knapped lithic artefacts in Cardiff which 5 people

attended and in July, Sally Worrell of UCL and Hugh Willmot of Sheffield University held a seminar on archaeological glass that attracted 10 people. All contributors and hosting institutions were thanked for generously giving up their time and expertise for the training programme.

Christine Longworth then reported on the future training programme that had been distributed earlier in the day. Five of the six meetings have dates fixed for them and bookings are now being taken.

Edmund Southworth suggested that all Regional MLA staff should be encouraged to attend the training programmes. David Crowther of the MLA responded by requesting an electronic version of the training programme that he could circulate in order to encourage MLA staff to attend.

7. Hon. Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer began by thanking Amanda Loaring for her work as Membership Secretary saying how much easier his role has been with her efficient organisation of the membership list and subscription payments.

The year's accounts were circulated to those present (these are appended). Subscriptions remain vital to the continuing financial health of the Society. Mary Kershaw observed how clearly presented the accounts are and they were approved by Philip Wise and seconded by Duncan Brown.

8. Committee 2004-05

The Secretary informed the meeting that Amanda Loaring (Membership Secretary), Adrian Green (Newsletter Editor) and Janet Owen had all tendered their resignations from the committee. In addition Sara Wear's term of office had also come to an end.

Three nominations for the committee had been received: Jennifer Blackford offered to stand as Membership Secretary. No nominations have been

received for the post of Newsletter Editor but Julia Habershaw and David Kendrick wished to stand as committee members. The three nominations were proposed by Tim Schadla-Hall and seconded by Philip Wise. They were duly elected.

It was agreed that the Vice-Chair would edit and produce the next Newsletter until a replacement Newsletter Editor has been identified.

9. Any Other Business

Tim Schadla-Hall offered a vote of thanks to all the committee for the current strength of the Society and for keeping it running so well.

10. Date of Next AGM

This will be held during the conference in November 2005 but a date and venue have yet to be arranged. It is hoped that this will be in the south-west of England.

Elizabeth Walker
Hon. Secretary

TRAINING SESSIONS 2005

Once again the SMA is organising a full programme of training sessions. The dates, venues and subjects are given below:

- 16 March**, Liverpool
Archaeological object drawing
- 20 April**, York
Archaeological leather: conservation, research and management
- 18 May**, Birmingham
Numismatics
- 26 July**, Portsmouth
Metallurgy
- 17 October**, Scunthorpe
Metal finds and Metalworking
- 2 November**, Lincoln
Medieval ceramics

For more information and booking details see the flier accompanying this Newsletter, or contact:

Christine Longworth, Liverpool Museum, William Brown Street, Liverpool L3 8EN, Tel. 0151 478 4311, christine.longworth@liverpoolmuseums.org.uk

SMA COMMITTEE 2004-05

Chairman Hedley Swain

Museum of London, London Wall, London, EC2Y 5HN
Tel: (020) 7814 5730
hswain@museumoflondon.org.uk

Vice-Chairman: Philip J. Wise

Colchester Museums Resource Centre, 14 Ryegate Road, Colchester, C01 1YG
Tel: (01206) 282929
philip.wise@colchester.gov.uk

Secretary: Elizabeth A. Walker

Department of Archaeology & Numismatics, National Museums & Galleries of Wales,
Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NP
Tel: (029) 2057 3274
Elizabeth.Walker@nmgw.ac.uk

Treasurer: Chris Hellier

Museum of Farnham, Wilmer House, 38 West Street, Farnham. Surrey, GU9 7DX
Tel: (01252) 715094

Editor: Tim Bridges

Worcester City Museum & Art Gallery, Foregate Street, Worcester, WR1 1DT
Tel: (01905)25371
tbridges@cityofworcester.gov.uk

Newsletter Editor: Post Vacant

Membership Secretary: Jenni Blackford

Rhodes, South Road, Bishops Stortford, Hertfordshire, CM23 3JG
01279 651746
jenniblackford@yahoo.co.uk

Training Officers:

Christine Longworth

Liverpool Museum, William Brown Street, Liverpool L3 8EN
Tel. 0151 478 4311
christine.longworth@liverpoolmuseums.org.uk

Thomas Cadbury

The Collection: Art and Archaeology in Lincolnshire, 12 Friars Lane, Lincoln, LN2 5AL
Tel. 01522 530401

Publication Sales: Claire Thornton

Verulamium Museum, St Michaels, St Albans, Hertfordshire, AL 3 4SW
Tel: (01727) 751822
c.thornton@stalbins.gov.uk

Other Committee Members are:

Mark Hall Perth Museum & Art Gallery

David Kendrick Worcestershire County Museum

Julia Habershaw Peterborough Museum & Art Gallery

Victoria Bryant Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Service

Peta-Louise Cook EEMLAC

Karen Wardley Southampton City Museums