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**EDITORIAL COMMENT**

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This copy of The Museum Archaeologist is a little later than intended owing to delays in the post, but it is hoped that it will still give time for members to visit the two exhibitions at Birmingham. It is hoped that others will consider it worth while writing about temporary exhibitions in these columns and also commenting upon new permanent displays. In the next number there will be a note on the new Dark Age Sculpture display in the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland.

The East Midlands are proposing to publish a series of notes on non-local archaeological material held in museums in the area institution by institution. It would obviously be of great benefit if other regions were able to undertake similar surveys so that a nationwide corpus of information becomes available.

The next number of The Museum Archaeologist will be appearing in October and any contributions should be received by the 17th September. The aim is to increase the number of issues to three a year, which will enable information about ephemeral events to be incorporated.



## STORAGE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL MATERIAL: THE PROBLEMS

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A paper read to the Society of Museum Archaeologists at Edinburgh on the 5th July, 1978, by Helen Adamson.

If we examine the published work on the subject of museum storage in this country it would appear, on the whole, that we prefer a pragmatic approach to the topic. We discuss the practicalities of storing specific types of objects and how individual problems can be overcome. This is undoubtedly a very useful approach which has been of value to many curators. However we rarely ask ourselves, at least in print, what value we set on reserve collections. Perhaps we should even consider whether the curator should be the sole custodian of these collections.

A few of our American colleagues have particularly radical views on the value of maintaining collections in museums. Fortunately, I do not think that any of them have yet been able to put their views into practice. One of their suggestions is that museums do not need to house reserve collections for, if the end result is the dissemination of information and ideas, it is unnecessary to keep the objects themselves but merely to convert them into visual and factual records. This is, indeed, an extreme view and, in the eyes of many, even a heretical view for it denies to museums their very uniqueness. If the amassing of information or ideas is all that is required then we, museum staff, might as well be employed in libraries or film studios. The one thing which sets museums apart from all other centres of education and information is the fact that we collect and preserve three-dimensional objects which have survived as records, albeit fragmentary, of our archaeological and historical past. It may be that our end result is, as Ian Findlay in his book Priceless Heritage: the Future of Museums has said, "A museum is not a collection or a building but an idea". However the idea or concept, in a museum context, is derived largely from the interpretation of these relics of human activity and this, I think, is our unique quality and one that is denied to other forms of educational media.

Assuming that most of us do accept the value of maintaining reserve collections, not only as records of human activity but as a source for future research and for use in temporary exhibitions, we may still ask ourselves how best we can cope with the quantity of objects involved. A few institutions have created what might be described as 'visible storage' where reserve material is available in public parts of the museum and the general visitor need not make special arrangements to see it. The Museum of Anthropology in the University of British Columbia has done this and so, to a certain extent, has the Zoological Museum of the University of Copenhagen. To achieve this, however, one needs to have started afresh in a new or enlarged building with ample allocation of space at the planning stage and not, as many of us have to do, jostle with other colleagues for limited space. 'Visible storage' is also initially expensive in the construction of display units and in the curatorial time required to produce records and cross-referencing systems which can be used by the public. By its very nature, 'visible storage' can give rise to conservation problems if certain types of objects are exposed to light continuously.



The use to which reserve collections are put may vary considerably from one museum to another. In national museums and in local authority museums in large urban areas with universities close by, it is likely that reserve collections will be used extensively by undergraduates and postgraduates alike, as well as by many other specialists carrying out individual research. Those of us who have to meet these varying needs should, perhaps, look at our museums in terms of a commercial firm and consider whether we should treat our reserve collections as a spare parts section, readily available on demand. We should think of keeping our reserve and study collections as a unit, even in a separate building, designed for the purpose of storage and planned for efficient running with full-time staff. As reserve material requires conservation, just as do objects for exhibition, it would seem logical that stores, laboratories and workshops should be close together and, in the future planning of new museums, we should stress the inter-relationship of these functions.

Whatever our theoretical ideas may be on the value and use of reserve collections, we all in our daily work are faced with the immediate task of looking after these objects and making them accessible both to ourselves and other researchers. While many of our storage problems are physical in their nature, there are other aspects whichacerbate the situation.

One problem is that of attitudes to storage. Storage is a Cinderella subject within the multifarious aspects of museum work. It has no charisma and it is not easy to convince museum committees of its importance. Undoubtedly, matters have improved in recent years and we read of, or see, museums which have spent a considerable amount of money in modernising storage facilities. Nevertheless, storage has to compete with other museum projects and it is a fact of life that committees and museum directors do not receive public acclaim for modernising stores. And yet, were we to evaluate our reserve collections in purely monetary terms, I should think our committees would be surprised to discover the value of these assets we hold. Perhaps it is our fault for not telling them. Neither should we play down the value of these collections for research purposes. After all, every student, college lecturer or specialist who is given access to our collections is a member of the general public. Our stores are by no means a closed shop for museum staff only.

We also suffer from accidents of history in that we are the inheritors of collections which have 'grown like Topsy'. As we are now in the last quarter of the twentieth century, many of our museums are reaching their centenary, some of us have even passed it, and we, as curators, are faced with not only an old building, but an accumulation of objects gathered somewhat haphazardly over a period of roughly one hundred years. It is a rare one amongst us who finds himself in a brand new museum with storage facilities custom-built. Few of us even find ourselves caring for archaeological collections alone. In larger municipal museums our departments tend to attract ancillary subjects, with the result that we may find ourselves looking after a heterogeneous



collection of local and 'exotic' archaeological objects, ethnographical, local history and folk-life specimens. The range in size and type of object is enormous.

Bearing these problems in mind, we are still faced with the practicalities of providing clean, efficient and systematic storage which satisfies conservation standards. Amongst our requirements are SAFE ENVIRONMENTS, PROVIDING PROTECTION FROM DETERIORATION. We are very aware of the need for suitable physical, particularly climatological, conditions in our stores. Part of the conservator's time is spent carrying out remedial work on objects which have deteriorated because they were stored in an unsuitable environment. There is little sense in our undoing this painstaking work by, once more, returning the objects to these same conditions. As students on Museums Association courses we were taught the rudiments of temperature and relative humidity control required by museum objects, but these can only be general indicators and we realise all too soon, that fluctuations cannot be avoided without the overall control of heating and ventilation systems. Few of us can aspire to the air-conditioned stores such as are provided in the Ulster Museum. In fact, stores are usually relegated to those parts of the building for which no-one can find a better use. They are frequently in basements where conditions are sometimes damp or, alternately, they may be cheek by jowl with the heating plant.

The prohibitive expense of installing full air-conditioning in an old building means we have to compromise and consider only individual elements which make up air-conditioning. Two of the most important are temperature and humidity. Museum objects, in general, can tolerate a broader temperature range than can humans, if the changes are gradual. However, if chemical or physical deterioration has already begun, the raising of the temperature will accelerate these conditions. Conversely, while humans can tolerate certain humidity variations, objects cannot as they are highly sensitive to humidity levels. Those objects which are composed of hygroscopic materials, e.g. wood, paper, leather, bone, ivory, silk, etc., are particularly sensitive. If the Relative Humidity of a store is high, then paper products swell and become a breeding ground for mildew and insects. To avoid mould and insect damage, RH values must be below 65% - 70%. The minimum RH levels are set at 45%, at which point wood begins to shrink and distort. In this way the median is set at 55% RH  $\pm$  10%, within a temperature range of roughly 63° - 68° F. This figure of 55% RH is, therefore, a compromise set to cover the tolerance range of the bulk of the materials likely to be stored together. Achieving this RH value is not easy for not only do we have to contend with spatial variations in humidity levels throughout a building due to external weather conditions, but we may have to face the problem of the museum's heating plant being turned on and off at specific times during the year. Without good temperature control it is difficult to obtain steady RH values.

If we discover that RH values are low in relationship to the temperature in a store, we can at least install humidifiers which will go some way to re-dressing the balance. The aerosol or atomizer type is of little use in a museum for the droplets can acquire an electrostatic charge which causes dirt and dust from the air to be deposited on the objects. The evaporative or vapour generator



types are of greater use. The evaporative humidifier takes up floor space but its mobility allows it to be wheeled readily from one store to another. Certain types provide air humidification and purification without a great deal of maintenance. The wall-mounted vapour generator type is more sophisticated and is used frequently in industrial or commercial premises. The unit price of a portable evaporative humidifier is now in the range of £300 - £350. The problem of cost is always with us and therefore we must choose our priorities. Here is an area where the conservator can work in conjunction with the curator, to the benefit of both. The conservator can act as an ally to the curator when they put forward a major scheme for the improvement of physical and climatic conditions in a store, particularly if the scheme will involve considerable expenditure. He can provide the data necessary to prove that the existing climatic conditions are unsuitable and he can supply advice on packaging materials whose chemical constituents are compatible with the objects stored in them.

When a re-organisation of storage is planned perhaps we, curatorial staff, should stop thinking in terms of neatly compartmentalised categories of archaeological specimens in one store, local history material in another, and consider them in the way the conservator does, i. e. in terms of the materials of which the objects are made. In a large museum covering a wide range of subjects, it would seem sensible to provide suitable physical and climatic conditions in one location for a variety of wooden objects, irrespective of whether they belonged to a department of Decorative Art, Local History or Folk Life. There are, undoubtedly, limitations to such an approach, e.g. archaeological finds which require to be kept in context, but it does seem to be a way of streamlining expenditure on storage if it can be seen to benefit a number of departments.

There is a school of thought which suggests that reserve collections should be cared for by conservation staff. This may have a certain amount of logic in that, if the conservator has conserved an object which was suffering from physical or chemical deterioration, he should also have control of its future environment within a store. However, this argument takes no account of the large proportion of archaeological material, e.g. flintwork or stone axes, little of which requires conservation or special storage facilities. The value of these objects lies in their availability for study and research and the conservator may not be interested in this aspect.

Another requirement of our stores is **DIRECT ACCESS TO THE OBJECTS**. We, as museum staff, realise the value of our reserve collections. Yet the value of these objects is only measurable in terms of the knowledge which may be derived from them. This, in turn, is directly related to their availability. I am sure that every curator has spent frustrating periods searching for objects, not only for other researchers but also for his own use. I have a suspicion that my attitude to those who want access to study the reserve collections in my museum is affected sometimes by the degree of availability of the objects they require. Perhaps we should put more emphasis on the commercial adage that 'time is money' and treat our own time accordingly.



A third requirement of our stores is FLEXIBILITY OF THE SYSTEM, COMBINED WITH THE MAXIMUM UTILISATION OF SPACE. Some curators may be fortunate enough to inherit from their predecessors a well-organised, systematic storage system but most of us have to face ad hoc arrangements. Stores may be scattered over several buildings, and, even if they are housed in one building, their distribution is likely to be haphazard. With archaeological material, it is still possible to find excavated finds stored in old tea chests, biscuit tins and tobacco boxes, the containers themselves being of more interest occasionally than the contents. Because of the range in size and type of object we have to store, we have considerable difficulty in finding one unified system for all of them. In terms of cost effectiveness, simple steel racks and shelving is sufficient for large, heavy and bulky objects which are seldom moved, provided that the objects or the racking is protected from dust and dirt. This type of storage is also adequate for large collections of excavated material which may arrive in the museum from a rescue dig or from an excavation unit. Once the material has been sorted, catalogued and registered, it may be necessary to transfer it to higher priority storage where accessibility is important and where it may be linked in a chronological or geographical context with the existing archaeological specimens. The increasing emphasis on the collection of organic remains from excavations does pose problems of space. We accept the value of keeping this sort of material for the purposes of long-term research but we are probably justified in allocating it low priority storage.

In urban areas we are faced with the particular problem of dirt and dust in our stores. Providing a barrier against these is an essential priority where there is little or no control over environmental conditions. Enclosed unit storage offers protection from dirt and light and should be sufficiently flexible to accommodate a variety of type of object. Some museums, such as the London Museum's Department of Urban Archaeology, have adopted industrial storage systems whereas others may prefer to lose some of the cost of fabrication and installation by using their own museum joiners. It is sensible to look at what is available from commercial firms for although their products may be made for non-museum purposes, they are often adaptable to museum needs. The problem of cost rears its head again. Of course initial expenditure on storage installations is high, but they are not a wasting asset. They involve little further expense and, in terms of the years of service they can give, they surely justify the initial cost. An important point worth considering is that your Area Council may be able to allocate up to 45% grant on the total cost of purchasing storage equipment.

When lack of space is a prime consideration it may be necessary to look at storage systems which utilise space to a maximum. Mobile storage racks add at least 60% more storage space and these could be the only solution in a building where there is no possibility of the physical expansion of storage space. Undoubtedly, this is an expensive system, particularly if the added sophistication of motor-driven units is considered. Hidden expenditure may also be incurred in that floors may need to be levelled before the basal runners can be installed. Even this type of storage can be grant-aided by an Area Council provided the curator has really done his homework and can make out a very good case for buying these units.



It might appear that I am advocating spending more and more money on storage facilities at the expense of conservation, display, temporary exhibitions, etc., but this is not the intention. What we must do is consider the function of our stores and the many uses to which our reserve and study collections are put. Obviously there are some who work in small museums whose reserve collections are rarely examined by anyone other than the curator himself - and he knows, in his head, where every single object is stored! In such a case it may seem irrelevant to spend time and money improving stores but at least he should give thought to the physical conditions in his store and consider whether the objects will survive into, and beyond, the year AD 2000, so that his successors may be able to use them.

For those of us in national museums and large, municipal museums, we accept that our stores are put to multiple use and serve various functions - as a depository for reserve material, a temporary resting place for exhibition items and as a work and study area for museum staff and visitors. We therefore have a need, even a duty, to create physical conditions which are satisfactory for the well-being of the objects and humans and to store these objects in an efficient, accessible system in order to cut down wastage of time and effort. We all suffer in varying degrees from the limitations set upon us in terms of money and space allocation and we may have to choose our own storage priorities as best we can. In large museums we might be able to achieve a good degree of cost effectiveness if we could adapt our way of thinking and learn to store specific materials together rather than providing individual stores for separate departments, as we are inclined to do at present.

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ARCHAEOLOGY AND MUSEUMS - ANOTHER VIEW

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C. Saunders.

' "There is nothing sad", said the other, "except History. All these things are only something to muse upon while you are hibernating".

"It is a good thing to muse?"

"Well it passes the time. Even H. sapiens has museums you know: and as far as that goes, he has put the chalky bones of Atlantosaurus in many of them, along with the scales of georgius sanctus".'

T. H. White, The Sword in the Stone

History may or may not be sad, and there may be a common view in some quarters that all archaeologists in museums hibernate, what I want to do here is to muse a little. To some what I have to say will probably appear naive, to others unnecessary. A recent paper (Davies, 1978) has explored somewhat polemically the present relationship between the practical aspects of museums and archaeology, but I want here to explore briefly the relationship of the museum and museum archaeology to some of the current philosophies and methodologies of archaeology. Most of us in the museum profession must at times wonder at the plethora of committees, be they local, county, national, advisory, executive or whatever, and the meetings and discussions we attend to discuss yet another report, advisory note or discussion paper on the future of British Archaeology; but how often do we sit back to examine not only our own role but the very nature of the discipline we are supposed to serve? Perhaps we all do, and my conviction that we spend more time arguing over means rather than ends is unjustified, but I hope that this paper, even if scorned, will at least serve to promote discussion on some of the issues it will hopefully raise.

The traditional role of the archaeological museum has been to collect artefacts, to conserve and store these for posterity, to catalogue and research these collections and to make them available for the research of others; and to inform the public through the medium of displays, publication, etc.. Few these days would see this as the sole function of a museum; increasingly we are involved in cultural resource management and other activities not confined by the walls of a building (Davies, 1978). What I wish to consider later is the role of the museum in the study of locality; what identifies and distinguishes a place is not the transient present, but the past; indeed the presence or absence of a museum in a particular locality is itself the result of past sociological and cultural factors. The museum service by which I am employed came about by joining together for economic reasons two institutions, one the result of Victorian antiquarianism and the other the result of Local Authority action following a research excavation in the 1930's. The nature of a locality and the particular form of its cultural landscape results from the interaction of human communities and the natural environment, and it is this



relationship between the two which forms the basis of much modern archaeology. This has been variously described as ecological, three dimensional (Clark, 1976) or contextual archaeology (Case, 1973). But before we can define the scope and role of our potential study it is necessary to look at recent trends in British archaeology and its relationship with other disciplines.

Since the advent in the 1960's of what has been termed the 'New Archaeology', there has been much discussion of archaeological theory and practice heralded in this country by D. L. Clarke's Analytical Archaeology (1968) now in its second revised edition (1978). Those of us who, eleven years ago, were perhaps stunned by the convoluted prose and foreign jargon which burst upon us may, even if still innocent, not now be so critical of the ideas put forward as we were then, but we should at least distinguish between those analytical techniques which are becoming accepted as standard archaeological practice and some of the philosophies and concepts of the 'New Archaeology' for the two are not necessarily synonymous (Doran and Hodson, 1975, 5). Much of what passes as new is securely based on old foundations, including the ecological approach (Clark, 1976, 7), and some would deny that the term 'New Archaeology' has any relevance. "It is clearly going to be very important to avoid needless and wasteful conflict of all kinds, between partisans of the various paradigms, or between the generations over the 'New Archaeology' ..... Statistical, taxonomic and computer archaeology are here to stay, together with the morphological, anthropological, ecological and geographical approaches. But they will very rapidly fade into perspective as means towards ends, intellectual machinery, which as always may be employed usefully or stupidly ..... Non-numerical 'old archaeologists' will be delighted to find that their potential is in no way diminished and that there will always remain scope for an infinite amount of valuable narrative synthesis, and high level intuitive speculations ..." (Clarke, 1972, 57).

Most of the debate of recent years has been concerned with the study of Prehistory, archaeologists working in historical or text-aided periods seeming less concerned to define the aims and limitations of their discipline. Most modern prehistorians would seem to agree that archaeology has as its three aims the reconstruction of culture history, the reconstruction of prehistoric patterns of culture, and the explanation of cultural process. Thus Renfrew has written of British Prehistory that "with the attainment of that long sought goal of dating and narrating Britain's past, we can now see how very far we are from the more important objective of explaining the changes observed. That I see as the task before us in this third phase of British prehistoric research". (Renfrew, 1974, 40).

Trigger (1978) has discussed the problems of a processual and historical approach to cultures and has shown how the American anthropological tradition, much of which has found its way into the 'New Archaeology', has seen the two as distinct problems with many adopting a naive view of history as simply a descriptive discipline. Some see the purpose of archaeology as producing laws of human behaviour or as an experimental social science capable of testing hypotheses relevant to the theories of the social sciences and so contributing to the explanation of human behaviour, or for explaining cultural differences and similarities. In this country, Clarke (1978, 12) has seen the purpose of



archaeology as "the recovery, systematic description and study of material culture in the past" and has stressed that among other things, archaeology is "the time dimension of anthropology and ethnology". The use of historical narrative as a vehicle for conveying the results of archaeology is seen as dangerous in that "it pleases by the virtue of its smooth coverage and apparent finality, whilst the data on which it is based are never comprehensive, never capable of supporting but one interpretation and rest upon complex probabilities. Archaeological data are not historical data and consequently archaeology is not history" (Ibid, 11). He then admits however that "The reconstruction of a historical or social picture of prehistoric cultures, written in a historical narrative, is a valid but incidental and dangerous aspect of archaeology". (Ibid, 12). Much of this argument of course centres around the definition of the term history which has many meanings (Dymond, 1974, 10); if we accept the "quite specialised meaning ... rarely found in dictionaries. It denotes the study of the human past from documentary sources alone. By documents, we mean all written sources, whether manuscript, printed or inscribed. This is primarily of course the field of the regular historian, whose job is to interpret written or verbal evidence". (Ibid, 10).

The historian E.H. Carr has written that "Scientists, social scientists and historians are all engaged in different branches of the same study: the study of man and his environment, of the effects of man on his environment and of his environment on man" (1961, 80). The difference between history and the generalising social sciences has been seen only in that the primary aim of the former is the explanation, in all their complexity, of individual situations rather than the formulation of general laws for "indefinitely repeatable events and processes", (Trigger, 1978, 26), although the historian does generalise and may provide general guides, but not specific predictions, for future actions (Carr, 1961, 63). It is clear that a study of process is not incompatible with the view that archaeology has an 'historical' objective. If before History there is only Pre-history then the only way we can study the greater part of man's existence is through the archaeological record, and knowledge of the past can only be derived from the interpretation of this surviving evidence. Trigger has used the analogy of biology and palaeontology as an example of the relationship between the modern social sciences and prehistory; in that detailed comparative studies of living species may suggest the historical relationship between these species, but the proof of these relationships can only be found in the fossil record. It is impossible on modern biological evidence alone to retrodict in detail the nature of species now extinct or the particular sequence of development which they passed through. "Generalisations and knowledge of present conditions alone do not permit the reconstruction of the past" (Trigger, 1978, 49).

Although we may make a valid distinction between the past as studied by archaeology and history, all enquiry into the past is limited by the nature of the evidence available and our own environment, so that the 'past in itself' is unknowable and cannot therefore be reconstructed; what we deal with and manipulate is the 'past as known' (Collingwood, 1946). Indeed it has been written that "Within the scope of our mental categories and their requirements of verifiable data archaeology is ..... a body of



myth and legend for our own times, as inspiring, consoling, entertaining and fugitive as those of the past", (Case, 1973). If the past in itself is unknowable then we can only validly study the past by the construction of various models and hypotheses which can be used to explain and test the available information as well as to generate new data. This has always been the case whether it was Thomsen's Three Age System or the cultural approach of V.G. Childe. Both archaeologists and historians have long utilised such an approach, "The world of the historian, like the world of the scientist, is not a photographic copy of the real world, but rather a working model . . . . .", (Carr, 1961, 98). In the historic past of the late 1950's Piggott could write that "In scientific terms he (i. e. the archaeologist) will construct a model, a mental creation expressing the relationships and arrangements, perhaps in a mathematical formula - which will best account for all the observations he has made. The model will be a true one in so far as it does satisfactorily account for the phenomena but you can have more than one model at a time all true . . . . .", (Piggott, 1959, 15). It is however one of the more conscious developments of recent years that whereas we have all used, whether we have admitted it or not, whether consciously or sub-consciously, models; now models are to be explicit and framed within various paradigms. This message has been hammered home in weighty volumes (Clarke (ed.), 1972, Renfrew (ed.), 1973), and archaeology has been stated to have three interrelated spheres of activity - that of data collection, principally excavation; that of systematic description, taxonomy and classification "and finally the integrating, synthesising study generating models, hypotheses and theories", (Clarke, 1978, 12).

With this concern for models and paradigms has come a spate of literature, much of it borrowing concepts and techniques from other disciplines. Clarke (1972) has distinguished four paradigms within which contemporary archaeology operates - Morphological; Anthropological; Ecological and Geographical, but again none of these is new; what is new is the explicit and formal borrowing of methods and techniques from other disciplines and the presentation and discussion of these within archaeology. None of these paradigms is necessarily discrete but may be interrelated with the others; the recent literature includes works on mathematics and computers (Doran and Hodson, 1975); anthropology and archaeology (Spriggs (ed.), 1977); an account of the environmental history of the British Isles and the nature of environmental evidence (Evans, 1975, 1978); site locations (Vita Finzi, 1978); and works on locational and spatial analysis (Hodder and Orton, 1976, Clarke (ed.), 1977).

No doubt at times we all feel overwhelmed by the amount of new techniques and concepts we are forced to consider, but we should at least welcome the rigorous presentation, analysis, and testing of the data which is now commonplace, even if our knowledge of mathematics may leave some of us bewildered.

Despite the present position, we may still hold the view that it is impossible to escape from the limitations of the archaeological record. Few of us probably would accept the view put forward by Binford that "data relevant to most, if not all, the components of past sociocultural systems are preserved in the archaeological record", (Binford, 1972, 95), but would probably follow Hawkes (1954) in agreeing that the progression through questions of technology-



subsistence economies-socio/political institutions - religious institutions and spiritual life means making inferences of lessening reliability. We should accept that "Archaeological evidence is an incomplete record of man's activities. While it may not be as incomplete as it may seem to the unimaginative, it is hard to imagine that it will ever inform us as fully as we would wish on many crucial matters. It may never inform us on some. So it is vital to determine what archaeological data can and cannot permit us to do", (Hole, 1973, 22). The same of course applies to other records of the past be it the fossil record or the documentary records of historians. The evidence is always incomplete and fails to inform us about those questions we would often like to ask. This is one reason why the combination of archaeological and historical evidence may generate models more explicit and powerful than those generated by either in isolation. Hence it has been stated that "the most important guiding principle of Medieval archaeology as we know it being its essential relationship with History", (Platt, 1978). There are of course problems in combining the two sorts of evidence (Dymond, 1974) but as Biddle has written with regard to the history of medieval towns "it is only through the combination of these two complementary sources, documentary and archaeological, that a balanced account of urban history can be written, but the problems involved are formidable. These problems arise from the fact that the evidence of archaeology and of documents is of different kinds, the one material the other abstract", (Biddle, 1968, 110). Similarly, in the case of Roman Britain, it is only through a combination of both forms of evidence that the 'history' of the province can be written (e.g. Frere, 1974); neither source would be sufficient on its own to produce an overall model.

It would of course be nonsensical to deny that there is no difference between archaeological and historical evidence but in one respect they may be compared: in many cases the evidence we use is unconscious evidence, in the case of archaeology "unconscious evidence because prehistoric flint implements or Roman pottery or Medieval churches were not thought of as historical evidence by the men who made them, but they acquire the character of evidence when the archaeologist discovers, examines and interprets them", (Piggott, 1959, 15). The same of course holds for much, but not all, documentary evidence: deeds, wills, accounts, tax returns and the like. To the historian a fact is only of historical relevance when it is deemed by the historian to be so (Carr, 1961, 14).

Having considered at some length the general nature of archaeology we may now turn to the problems of data collection. It should now be clear that if we are to use the powerful tools of analysis now available to us then our collection of basic data must be more rigorous and defined than it has often been in the past; many museums, as well as the one in which I am now sitting, must have in their reserves collections of material to which such methods cannot be applied simply because they are selective and biased or for which inadequate documentation exists. But first we will consider two disparate views on the nature of data collection, perhaps significantly the first comes from a Prehistorian, the second from an archaeologist working within an historic period. Renfrew (1974, 39), in discussing the changing configurations of British prehistory, has pointed to the rapid loss of evidence through development and agriculture and the 'large sums' of money now available for rescue excavation but considers



that "The tragedy is that this wonderful and unrepeatable opportunity may have come too early . . . . . Our thinking is still largely governed by the concepts and ideas of the second phase of British prehistoric research, by typologies and culture names and cross-cultural parallels. Many archaeologists feel today that we know how to excavate a settlement site, that it can be done adequately following recognised procedure. The truth is the opposite. Any archaeological site contains so much potential information that any kind of excavation is simply a sampling procedure and a very partial one at that. A decision has to be made about what to sample . . . . . And because we do not in all cases know what we are looking for, in the sense that we have not yet formulated all the questions to which we desire an answer we shall not find it . . . . . Without this, much of the digging will simply be a waste of time, an accumulation of data fit only to answer yesterday's questions which no-one is asking any longer". This can be compared with the view put forward in the latest volume of *Britannia* (Frere, 1978), "For a brief period a good deal got rescued much of it of high importance. At present, however, there is a powerful movement in favour of making lists of categories, and of priorities for excavation within them, so that (in theory) a fair sample is recovered - and the rest of necessity left to perdition . . . . . Whatever may be the situation with remains of other periods, so much is already known about the archaeology of the Roman period that the desiderata are correspondingly vast and complex . . . Not every rescue excavation need necessarily aspire to the full range of scientific back-up. Much vital historical and architectural information can be won without providing the full treatment, either scientific or technical . . . . ."

We may perhaps sympathise with both these viewpoints but they do reflect diverse opinions over the collection and study of archaeological material. The first has come to be known as a 'problem solving' approach; the second suggests that the ad hoc collection of material, even in a limited aspect, will provide data to answer future research questions. Here we may introduce another element of the contemporary debate, namely the application of the scientific method to archaeology, and in particular the use of deductive as opposed to inductive reasoning. The use of deduction which many consider to be an explicitly scientific approach, as compared to the non-scientific process of induction, was proposed by Binford in 1968 (Binford, 1972, 89) and others have elaborated the arguments for this approach (e.g. Hill, 1972). However, a review of the 'New Archaeology' in America shows that this is the only major tenet of this creed the acceptance of which is in doubt, (Trigger, 1978, 7) and many have criticised such an approach (Clarke, 1978, 487; Doran and Hodson, 1975, 339). We will not pursue this debate further except to note that, although there is undoubtedly a place in archaeology for the formal testing of hypotheses, much archaeological explanation has traditionally resulted from inductive reasoning and that the process of every day reasoning involves observation and inference, induction and deduction. Indeed psychological experiments have shown that the correct solution to a logical problem may be reached by using illogical processes.

It remains true however that the collection of data relevant to any problem can only be collected if the right questions are being asked, and it is paradoxically true that although the archaeological record may be limited in terms of the cultural systems which produced it, the extensive nature of the surviving evidence means that we cannot simply collect all the information relevant to a study of the past.



We always have sampled and must continue to sample the available evidence, but whereas in the past we have used 'purposive or judgement sampling', the increased use of statistical inference in archaeology has led to the welcome proposal that we should use various forms of probabilistic sampling and the matter has been discussed in some detail (Cherry et al. (eds.), 1978). We must however be aware of the problem that asking questions and sampling for particular research objectives will also produce information relevant to other questions and objectives. There must therefore be a minimum corpus of data from every excavation which must be recorded to satisfy the needs of other workers: we have always been aware of the excavators' responsibility to a site, in that since excavation destroys there is an obligation to record for posterity, (Trigger, 1978, 15; Haselgrove, 1978, 160), but the problem remains that this 'archive objective' as it has sensibly been called (Jones, 1978, 194) will change as new questions are asked and new forms of data required. This problem is particularly pertinent to museums, who unlike the excavator who records for posterity, must preserve for posterity. Haselgrove, commenting on Clarke's (1977, 6) statement that our choice must be a 'skilful gamble' between the impossibility of recording everything, research objectives, and those supplementary objectives which are financially possible, contends that - "this gamble should take the form of a nationally integrated research design, based on our prior knowledge of the variability, density and characteristics of archaeological remains accessible to us and on agreement as to which of the questions that archaeological data have the capacity to answer in terms of the resources available to us should constitute the core of research effort", (Haselgrove, 1978, 160). This may be 'pie in the sky' but we should at least stress that 'resources available' must include the capacity of museums to conserve, store and catalogue as recent discussions over the 'Dimpleby Report' have shown.

Nor should we forget in this context that the quality of material which museums will in future need to store will be of a rather different kind than in the past. Experiments in sieving and flotation techniques, as well as being essential to the collection of environmental data, have shown that the amount and kinds of artifactual evidence recovered by such methods may seriously change our views as to what proportion of the evidence we have been collecting. Similarly we may note Clarke's cautionary tale of volunteers and the possibility that the wide range of recovery rates may effect our knowledge of the distribution of finds in the ground (D.V. Clarke, 1978). Here the suggestion that we should conduct excavations to investigate sampling procedures and their validity in fulfilling primary objectives and yielding secondary information, and to evaluate the limits of question and inference which the archaeological record is capable of yielding (Haselgrove, 1978, 162) is welcome, and should concern museums who need to assess the content of the 'archive objective' which might be recovered in relationship to existing and potential collections.

I seem to have returned to museums again and we can now consider further the study of locality. From the discussion above it will be clear that I believe such a study can have 'historical' objectives and indeed that these are essential as our collections contain material from both prehistoric and historic periods. It may be that it will be necessary to work within an ecological and geographical paradigm and to propose explanations in terms of models using the full range of data collection and analytical techniques available to us. This will inevitably move us away from the more traditional



aspect of the museum's role, and will inevitably involve a process of re-education for many of us. We should not be afraid of this challenge, but may wonder if the organisational framework of museums will allow the nettle to be grasped. I will not here discuss the problem of defining localities or regions which in terms of cultural history have<sup>not</sup> been static and do not conveniently correlate with Local Government boundaries (either before or after re-organisation), but may note that a proper study may well take us out of our traditional collecting boundaries and involve close co-operation with colleagues in other museums, or an extension of our activities into areas at present without museum provision. The intensive fieldwork and sampling strategies demanded will necessarily involve close involvement with amateur societies and others in the communities in which we are situated, while the range of our study will involve all our museum colleagues be they geologists, natural historians, or social historians: bringing us to a study of 'total archaeology' (Dymond, 1974) and community (Trigger, 1978, 115). There should also be acceptance that the funding of excavations aimed at studying our locality will probably be a local responsibility with national funding geared to research programmes of national significance, although how to distinguish the two is a matter of discussion and agreement. It might be argued that to study our localities properly we all need an increase in staff; this may well be true, but the great advantage of a museum is (one hopes) its permanence, thus the design of a long-term research strategy which can be carried out slowly, or in various aspects, is essential. The unfortunate need to carry out rescue excavations and publish the results will always in the foreseeable future consume many man hours, but the linking of excavation policies to our overall strategy and the definition of a local archive objective will allow our various models to be tested and modified. No two local archaeologies will be the same, as no two collections are the same, or indeed no two museums. If all this is possible the advantage which will accrue to British Archaeology from museum involvement will be something more than the preservation of chalky bones and rusty scales, something more than a simple 'collecting policy' and more than a simple contextual locality index; it will provide a set of local archaeologies with their corresponding archives, at one time preserving the past and an intellectual concept of it and allowing for inter-locality modelling and synthesis on a larger and wider scale in the future.

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## TWO EXHIBITIONS IN BIRMINGHAM CITY MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY

6TH APRIL TO 20TH MAY, 1979

### Scholars, Scribes and Schoolboys

An exhibition of tax receipts and census returns may seem to represent a serious intrusion into the privacy of individuals but you will soon be able to see these and similar documents in an exhibition in the Museum and Art Gallery. We do not anticipate any trouble from the individuals concerned since they have all been dead for nearly 2000 years but this does not detract from the interest of the exhibition.

The exhibition has been arranged to illustrate the wealth of written evidence about the past available on papyrus documents. Papyrus was a writing material invented by the ancient Egyptians and made from papyrus plant. It was economic to make, convenient to use and given dry conditions would last indefinitely. Large numbers of these documents have survived in Egypt, in particular from the Hellenistic and Roman period. The study, papyrology, is highly specialised and undertaken by relatively few scholars but the amount of information that these papyri contain is enormous.

The papyri have been selected from the Rendell Harris collection, in the Selly Oak Colleges Library and from the great mass of papyri recovered from the town of Oxyrhynchus in Middle Egypt in the 1890's and now housed in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. They are loaned by kind permission of the Trustees of the Selly Oak Colleges and the Egypt Exploration Society.

The papyri that will be on exhibition illustrate the wide range of subjects covered. As well as government documents like the tax receipts and census lists, banknotes and orders for military supplies, there are legal papers, including leases for houses and land registration, commercial documents, receipts for loans, cheques, etc., and private family letters.

Another important section deals with literary texts. Many of the Greeks living in Egypt were interested in classical Greek literature and had their own copies which are among the earliest extant manuscripts of the great Greek writers and are therefore of great importance in establishing the original text. The exhibition includes papyri containing the text of a play by the comedy writer Menander and The Constitution of Athens by Aristotle which are both otherwise unknown.

Some of the papyri are written by scribes with a fine hand who produced legible and attractive manuscripts, others are hastily scrawled by over-worked clerks or laboriously formed by bored schoolboys. Whatever their quality of handwriting and whatever the content, be it passages of Homer or a handbill for a circus with six chariot races, they are direct links between us and the ancient world into which they provide a wealth of fascinating insights.



## Art in the Roman West Midlands

In 1937, Professor R. G. Collingwood wrote, 'Before the Roman conquest the Britons were a race of gifted and brilliant artists: the conquest, forcing them into the mould of Roman life with its vulgar efficiency and lack of taste, destroyed that gift and reduced their arts to the level of mere manufactures'. This view contrasts strikingly with that of Professor J. M. C. Toynbee writing in 1964, 'Romano-British carvings can claim to be regarded as the most impressive and original manifestations of art in Roman Britain'.

Collingwood's assumptions have been shown to be erroneous by a number of scholars. The West Midlands, for example, presents a range of artistic talent which indicates the varied response made by the local Dobunnic and Cornovian craftsmen to the classical themes and standards. The capital of the tribe of the Cornovii, Wroxeter, is thought to be the centre of a school of stonemasons, carving both funerary and votive objects and architectural features. The region is particularly rich in relief sculptures.

Most of the objects on display in the exhibition are what we would term today applied art. That is, they formed decorative elements of bowls, knives, spoons, jugs, chests and boxes, whether for use in the home or in a religious context. Only the fresco paintings and engraved gemstones can be called fine art. The material ranges from the spectacular silver mirror, probably made in an Italian workshop, and the East Mediterranean silver 'Christian' spoon through continental glass medallions and carved bone to locally produced bronzes, decorated pottery and stonework.

This is the first time for nearly twenty years that an exhibition of this nature has been mounted and the opportunity has been taken to select material from recent excavations which has not otherwise been exhibited, together with some of the more famous pieces. A handlist of the exhibits will be available.

These two exhibitions have been arranged by the Department of Archaeology in association with the Classical Association and the Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies, who are meeting in Birmingham to mark the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the founding of the Classical Association and the Centenary of the Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies.



NOTES FROM THE SECRETARY

The Dimbleby Report; Report of the Open Meeting in London,  
16th March, 1979

The following statement summarising the discussions of your Executive was submitted to the meeting. We are aware that criticisms can be made of the Report, but we feel quite strongly that at this stage it is far more important to cajole the government into implementing the recommendations of the Report. It was clear from the statements of the two government representatives present at the meeting that not only is there no national policy of managing archaeology in the totality of the process from fieldwork to permanent archival storage, but that the very concept of such is still alien to the thinking of some parts of the Civil Service.

The SMA welcomes the recommendations in the report 'The Scientific Treatment of Material from Rescue Excavations', especially the proposed procedures to ensure the compilation of a proper excavation archive for each site. We urge the Department of the Environment to adopt them as a basis for future discussions in which we hope all the parties present at this meeting will participate.

The Society is concerned that the investment in each excavation archive should be

- a. safeguarded by adequate storage and maintenance facilities in the appropriate museum,
- b. realised by good information retrieval systems for public use.

Although the 40% grants-in-aid available from the Department of Education and Science are of immense value to museum authorities in meeting some of the high initial capital costs of good storage, there are serious problems urgently needing discussion.

1. Whereas museum authorities have been able to finance long-term maintenance of material from excavations, the high initial costs of conservation have proved to be an excessively heavy burden. Although this should be eased if the procedures outlined in Chapter VII of the Report are followed, we would suggest the solution to the problem lies in the joint development of existing Area Museum Council facilities by the DES and DoE rather than the latter spending considerably more money in setting up separate institutions.
2. The computerisation of records. We suggest that the most cost-effective way of managing the task of assimilating the archive into this form would be by combining the index with that of all other museological data derived from other disciplines perhaps on a regional basis using the systems developed by the MDAV.



It is, we believe, as all of us here are maintained by and are responsible for discharging public monies, imperative that between us we find the most cost-effective ways of solving these problems.

### Treasure Hunting

The Society of Museum Archaeologists, The Museums Association, The Standing Conference of Unit Managers, Rescue and The Council for British Archaeology have agreed to mount a joint campaign to combat the irresponsible and anti-social practice of treasure hunting. A joint statement of intent has been produced as the base of the publicity campaign to be mounted over the summer. The SMA has agreed, as its contribution so far:

1. to finance the production of car stickers,
2. to participate in the general publicity campaign at a national and local level.

We obviously depend on each individual member of the Society to help with the campaign by using our own publicity contacts and we will keep you informed through the Newsletter of further plans. Apart from a fuller report to you at the Annual General Meeting, news of further developments will also be carried in the CBA Newsletter, the Museums Association Bulletin and Rescue News. Car stickers will be available from David Dawson, c/o The City Museum and Art Gallery, Queen's Road, Bristol 8.

Treasure hunting constitutes a great threat to the country's archaeological heritage, and is thus contrary to the national interest. The concept of treasure hunting is totally at variance with the objectives and practices of archaeology in studying and safeguarding our tangible past for the public good of present and future generations.

At present it is legal for metal detectors to be used with the consent of the landowner although unauthorised subsequent interference with Scheduled Ancient Monuments is illegal. Every opportunity should be taken to explain to landowners as well as to metal detector users and the public, the problems resulting from their unauthorised use on known archaeological sites.

It is recognised that many users of metal detectors are motivated by a genuine interest in the past and its remains and that they would not knowingly damage those remains. Such people are welcome to join the active membership of British archaeology, but they must accept the methods and disciplines of archaeology.



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Antiquities, British Museum

Scotland Miss H. C. Adamson

Depute Keeper, Department  
of Archaeology, Ethnography  
and History, Glasgow Art  
Gallery and Museum

Museums North

N. W. Federation

Yorkshire and  
Humberside Mrs. E. Hartley

Keeper of Archaeology,  
The Yorkshire Museum

W. Midlands Mrs. R. Taylor

Deputy Keeper of  
Archaeology, Birmingham  
City Museum and Art  
Gallery

E. Midlands A. White

Keeper of Archaeology,  
Lincoln City and County  
Museum

S. Midlands C. Saunders

Keeper of Field  
Archaeology, St. Albans  
Museums



London Museums	Miss P. Wilkinson	Senior Assistant Curator, Archaeology and Local History Section, Passmore Edwards Museum
Welsh Affiliated	C.J. Delaney	Curator, County Museum, Carmarthen, Dyfed
S. W. Federation		
S. E. Federation	T. Schadla-Hall	Keeper of Archaeology, Hampshire County Museum Service
Co-opted	G. Davies	Director and Keeper of Archaeology, St. Albans Museums