

**Large print transcription of an audiovisual introduction to the Pitt Rivers Museum with Sir David Attenborough. Originally recorded in 1992, and edited in 2010.**

## **Taking the Past into the Future A Visit to the Pitt Rivers Museum**

The people taking part in the unscripted discussion are:

- Sir David Attenborough (DA)
- Dr Schuyler Jones (SJ), former Director of the Pitt Rivers Museum
- Dr Howard Morphy (HM), former Curator of the collections
- Dr H el ene La Rue (HLR), former Curator of the collections
- Ken Jackson (KJ), interviewer

An introduction and conclusion are provided by Dr Michael O'Hanlon (MOH), current Director of the Museum.

This text can be downloaded and read in conjunction with the audiovisual production, which can be found [here](#).

This forty five minute presentation is an edited version of the Museum's first audioguide, which was later illustrated with one hundred and seventy two photographs of the artefacts mentioned. Brief captions for all the artefacts are provided at the end of this document.

The discussion covers the following topics in short sections

- 1 Introduction
- 2 History and background
- 3 Weaving
- 4 Barkcloth
- 5 Feathered cloaks
- 6 Pottery
- 7 Outrigger canoes
- 8 Navigation
- 9 Model boats
- 10 Arctic clothing
- 11 Magic, charms and witchcraft
- 12 Ancient Egypt
- 13 African carving
- 14 The role of the artist
- 15 Transformation mask
- 16 Treatment of dead enemies
- 17 Baskets
- 18 Carved ivory
- 19 Dwellings
- 20 Musical instrument
- 21 Queen Victoria
- 22 Noh masks, Japan
- 23 Balfour and Blackwood, Pitt Rivers Museum staff
- 24 Forsters' Pacific collections
- 25 The Kingdom of Benin
- 26 Shadow puppets
- 27 Totem pole
- 28 Netsuke (Japanese toggles)
- 29 Surgical treatment
- 30 Traps
- 31 Firearms
- 32 Conclusion

## 33 Image captions

### 1 Introduction

MOH: Hello, welcome to the Pitt Rivers Museum. I am Michael O'Hanlon, the Museum's director. A while ago now, as part of the first audio tour of the museum, David Attenborough was recorded in conversation with museum staff as they wandered through the displays. The other participants were my predecessor as director, Schuyler Jones, and curators Howard Morphy and H el ene La Rue. The result was a wonderful snapshot of their responses to some of the many objects on display, along with thoughts on the history of the museum and its close connection with anthropology as a subject.

There were many personal insights into the diverse cultures represented in the museum and into the contemporary relevance of the collections.

Since that first audio tour, the museum has undergone a decade of redevelopment. We've restored the museum's original entrance panorama, we've established an in-gallery teaching space, and built a major new extension which houses the museum's research, collections and conservation facilities.

But that original recording, representing a moment in the museum's history in the 1990s, is much too good to archive unused. So, we've edited and illustrated it to provide an informal and informative introduction to the collections. We hope you enjoy it.

### 2 History and background

KJ: Now we've come through the Natural History Museum to get to the Pitt Rivers, but is it possible in a nutshell to put the contents of the Pitt Rivers into one sentence? What are we going to see?

DA: We are going to see things made by people by hand, a high proportion of them that are of practical use for the various things we all require in life, and we are seeing them from all over the world. And the important thing about it is that General-Pitt Rivers decided in the nineteenth-century that one important way of looking at these was to put together all the things people did for one particular purpose, taken from all over the world. And that technique is almost, these days, unique to this museum.

He also believed that if you could show three objects, it was better than showing one, and so this is the richest plum pudding of a museum that you could ever find anywhere.

KJ: Doctor Schuyler Jones was Director of the Pitt Rivers at the time of the recording, so he seemed the best person to ask for a definition of anthropology.

SJ: Well, anthropology, in its broadest sense, is the study of all human beings which includes, of course, physical anthropology as well as cultural anthropology and social anthropology, and a lot of other branches which have now become independent scientific subjects in their own right. We are a teaching department of the University and we've got graduate and undergraduate students here studying both prehistoric archaeology and cultural anthropology. One of the things that we have retained, not a hundred percent, but largely, was General Pitt-Rivers' idea that materials should be displayed *typologically*. In other words, all lamps should be displayed together irrespective of what part of the world they come from, so that most visitors who come to museum perhaps are a bit bewildered, at first, about the way in which things are arranged, because they are accustomed to most museums having a gallery of West African art, or North American art and that sort of thing. And here everything is mixed up according to type.

And it is fascinating, when you group this very diverse material together from different cultures, to see not only the similarities in the solutions which they have found for solving these problems, but also the ingenious differences.

### 3 Weaving

DA: There are two obvious ways of explaining the variety: one is that an object was invented by one small group of people and then spread through the rest of the world called roughly *diffusionism*. And the other is that these techniques were independently discovered by different groups.

Diffusionism is a very attractive idea because it enables you to let your imagination run riot as to how people could have travelled, but it's a very dangerous one because the fact of the matter is, that if one set of human beings thinks of a solution to a problem, it's equally probable that another one did quite differently and independently. So you have to be very careful before you say, well, there is this weaving technique in this group and the similar one over there on a different continent, therefore they must have travelled. You cannot say such a thing.

Actually, when you come to think of it, cloth is a very simple thing. It has threads crossing one another at right angles and woven in between one another. The long ones are called warp and the ones that go across are called weft. And you would think that with that very simple basis, that the products that have come from it are rather limited and rather similar. And yet here you see how extraordinarily clever people have become in getting pattern into the thing, in how they dye it in different kinds of ways and produced this extraordinarily rich variety. I mean, look at that magnificent cloth there which already has its highly complex pattern, which people have got in their mind. The woman who was doing it (because it is nearly always woman's work, worldwide, I think really), the woman has to know that

patterning, which has great importance to her, and has to get it absolutely right as she weaves it.

#### 4 Barkcloth

KJ: Here's an unusual material. Barkcloth?

SJ: Yes, barkcloth is an alternative to ordinary textiles and it has been made in the Pacific for a very long time by people who had no knowledge of weaving. So, they have arrived at a similar solution to the problem of a textile, but in a very ingenious way. And they selected the bark from certain trees and removed it carefully and then soaked it in water. And then the bark is laid on a log, and then it's pounded and this then is pounded out and these fibers are separated to produce an amazingly fine quality of material that very, very closely resembles cloth. And as you can see, they have also devised very ingenious ways of decorating it with stains of various kinds.

KJ: You of course, David, have done a lot of fieldwork, and seen this happening often?

DA: Very much. I've seen it happen in Tonga and then Fiji. When this lovely material, and it *is* lovely material, when it came back for the first time, it was brought by Captain Cook, and he collected *tapa* from all the villages in Oceania that he went to, in the Pacific, and made up albums of them which were sold, as it were, like books and were a marvel in the eighteenth-century. People thought how beautiful it is, as indeed it is. And they used this bark from the mulberry tree in the Pacific, and they put this over some patterns there, with raised designs and just as you can take a coin and put pencil over top of it, so if you rub it you can get the design to come through, so they did that with a brown stain in order to produce these sort of patterns, which they then enhanced by hand.

## 5 Feathered cloaks

SJ: What we have here is a magnificent example of a Hawaiian feather cloak. These particular ones are from the nineteenth-century, and these were worn by members of the royal family on special occasions.

KJ: David your chance for wildlife? What birds could they have taken these from?

DA: Well, there were two kinds of birds which were unique to the Hawaiian Islands and they have these beautiful colours. And the Hawaiians used to trap them and pulled the scarlet feathers or the yellow feathers from them and then released them again. One's called the O'o and the other's called the I'iwi, I think. And I think that the O'o is still there, but many others have become extinct. But I don't think you can blame the Hawaiians for that. You have to blame the Europeans who came and introduced all kinds of other things which did the birds down and they destroyed a great deal of the local vegetation on which the birds depended, and the flowers on which particularly they depended.

## 6 Pottery

DA: The interesting thing, of course, is that you don't have to have a wheel to make a circular pot. We use a wheel, but there are a great number of cultures here, some of those African ones, for example, which are made not by throwing a pot on a wheel, to produce a circular pot, but by taking coils of clay and building up the pot by putting the coil along the rim, and then smoothing it over and it becomes remarkably circular.

## 7 Outrigger canoes

DA: Having said that one of the traps of ethnology is to be making deductions about diffusionism, and that any one

idea which occurs to one group of people will then spread, so if you see the same technique in another group, you believe it would have come from some particular centre, and saying that that was dangerous. Here we are in front of these canoes in which you have this device of an *outrigger*, that is to say a smaller version of the main canoe, which is attached to it by transverse poles, and which gives the canoe added stability. And each group in the Pacific developed its own particular way of doing that, so that you can identify to very precise degree the group of islands from which any particular canoe was made.

SJ: And we have quite a large number of full-size canoes, a birch-bark canoe from North America, and kayaks from the Arctic brought back at a very early time.

## 8 Navigation

SJ: We have a Pacific navigation chart here. It is in fact a chart made by islanders to locate the positions of islands. So they have taken strips of wood to create this rather strange pattern and they have put shells on them at different points which mark islands. And this is in fact a pre-European navigation chart.

HLR: It's fascinating because what they've drawn is a map showing all the prevailing winds and currents, so the winds and currents are shown by the straight pieces of cane. And the islands themselves are the shells. So that, whereas our measurements of directions at sea are usually done by the stars (so you've got the quadrants at the end of the case and then you've got the compasses where you're looking for the magnetic North), there they must have had, originally, very fine knowledge of currents and winds to work out where they are, to read the chart in the first place. So it's mnemonic. It's a reminder of how you find your way around those seas, that was made in 1897, and alongside you've

got the 1731 English improved form of Hadley's quadrant which in some ways looks a bit basic compared to the map!

DA: The powers of observation of these navigators beggar belief. You know the trouble with Europeans like ourselves is that we really have lost the ability to see an awful lot of things. And I've sailed with people over and across the Pacific and they can see ripples and transverse-ripples which tell them that they were ripples caused by an island maybe ten miles away. And they see the change of the current, the shift of the wind, and the ripples caused by islands over the horizon.

They also of course know from the birds, from which way the birds have been coming, where there are landmasses and so on, so that they can find their way across the empty expanses of ocean in the way that you find almost unreal. And yet, in addition to all that, you have to remember that not only could they find their way, but they were so confident that they would sail out into the blue far, far beyond the horizon to find land which they were sure was there because of these various signs.

## 9 Model boats

HLR: These boats are all scale models made to show the museum-visiting audience exactly what the boats were like, but made by the people who used the objects, not actually made by an Englishman going and copying them. In this case, a very large proportion of the objects come from the General's original collection, so you actually have some very beautiful canoes.

Right at the top of this case is an *umiak*. The umiak was the Inuit boat in which everybody fitted. It wasn't like the kayak where you have one person at most. Sometimes you have a little puppy dog underneath. It was sometimes known as the

woman's boat so that you have all the women sitting in it and it was quite a heavy craft compared to the kayak. There are several examples of Haida boats; these are the same peoples who made the totem poles, like our big totem pole. There's a very fine one with a bear on the prow.

## 10 Arctic clothing

SJ: One of the questions that people often ask about the Pitt Rivers Museum is "are you still collecting?" and the answer is "yes". This Inuit costume here is from Western Greenland and it was made by a lady in Sisimiut, named Haldora Davidson and she made it specially for the Pitt Rivers Museum. We commissioned her to make it. And it is the kind of costume that young ladies, and indeed older ladies, in Greenland wear today. They are very proud of their national costume and they wear it to church on Sundays and they wear it to birthday parties and all kinds of special occasions, weddings, even though they admit it's very uncomfortable.

DA: It seems to me that this costume is a spectacularly beautiful object, but clearly it contains all sorts of images and designs which weren't part of the Inuit. I mean, look at these flowers. The Inuit have never seen flowers like that. I should think they're chrysanthemums and I should think that they were probably influenced by the Chinese, and yet it has been incorporated into this costume with spectacularly beautiful results.

DA: And next you can see some cloaks and what we would call anoraks, and 'anorak' is in fact an Inuit term, and we all know what it means, but they invented the first sort in their icy seas and they made their anoraks out of the intestines of seals, which is what that quilt material is, and that's why it is sewn in those small strips.

HLR: And those seams have to be water-tight, and you can actually see quite clearly the tiny, tiny stitches which in the originals, the very earliest ones, those stitches were made with the use of bone needles because metal, which has to be mined from the ground, obviously can't be mined, even if it exists, in the Polar regions. It's far too cold and there's far too much to get through before you get to the metal. So the metal needles were as a result of trade and it was only when they could trade, when they had the source, when the Russians and then later the English had gone up to that area, that they were actually able to obtain the metal needles. So that fine stitching was done with bone.

## 11 Magic, charms and witchcraft

KJ: Magic.

HM: When one thinks about magic, what *is* magic? It consists of a whole series of very different kinds of objects. I am certainly very interested in magic and religion and the whole area of the spiritual nature of human existence in the way that it's manifested in objects and material culture and art and so on and so forth.

KJ: In front of us there are so many things?

HM: Categories like religion and ritual are very broad categories and this is one of the sorts of problems with the typology that Pitt-Rivers set up. If we separated out those objects and put them in different cases we could label them as art objects, and some of them are used in divination, and so on and so forth. Then we get enormous category of things here that are, if you like, lumped together in this category of magic. You will certainly find things from Headington, things from Wantage, and one of the objects that I'd like us to actually have a look at comes from Hove in Sussex, and it's a slightly dangerous object.

DA: Well, it is a silver bottle and I have no idea what it is.

HM: Well, it is a bottle from Hove in Sussex. And if we read the label here it says 'silvered and stoppered bottle, said to contain a witch, obtained in 1915 from an old lady living in a village near Hove, Sussex. She remarked "and they do say there be a witch in it, and if you let un out there'll be a peck o' trouble."'

KJ: A certain amount of the natural world is coming in, David. In the first cabinet I notice a mandrake root. This is what, Black Bryony?

DA: "Get with child a mandrake root." Yes, John Donne. Well, that was part of the magical practices of Britain and the mandrake it was supposed to shriek when you pulled it out. It was a medicinal root, and if you pulled it out, without taking certain precautions, you would hear the mandrake shriek and then you would die. So you did all sorts of things like tying a donkey to it or to a dog, and then running away, putting your hands across your ears and calling the dog, and presumably the dog did die.

HM: We tend to associate magic and things like this with other worlds, and not with our own. And it's a salutary lesson to see that many of the magical objects actually are from Britain, and from the quite recent past, and I am quite certain that magic is still an ongoing component of society all over the world.

## 12 Ancient Egypt

DA: I once went into a gallery in Saqqara, which I think had three million mummified hawks in it. And there is evidence that the priests who ran that also ran a hawk farm at the back in order to supply mummies for the faithful ..... which they had to buy in order to ingratiate themselves to the spirits. But the Egyptians mummified birds in enormous quantity. Of course the much more spectacular mummy is

the human being lying in his or her sarcophagus. She, I see the label says?

HM: Yes, indeed so.

KJ: On top of this small wooden box, a beetle. Is this the scarab?

DA: That is a scarab beetle, which is one of the Egyptian symbols of the eternity of the soul. I believe because it hatched out of the earth and [from] something that looks totally dead, a living organism would arise, and that was seen as a symbol of the human spirit.

HM: And you were asking earlier about selection from the natural world. You find that animals that have properties of apparent regeneration or that transform themselves from one state of existence into another, from caterpillar to pupa to butterfly, that they tend to be taken up in religious symbolism as examples of the way in which human beings might be able to transform their state of existence.

### 13 African carving

HM: If we look in the case that shows the sculpture, in particular, from Africa we can again see objects that have very different functions which we can also see have this dimension that we would classify as *art*. We have a Yoruba house post in the corner here, we have a chair from the Cameroons. And we have here an object, although it will be prized in the auction houses of Europe as an example of one of the sort of great works of African sculpture, (which) is in fact a functional object as well and was produced as a functional object whose shape has evolved over many years of its use in the culture.

KJ: This is a figure, but full of nails and spears and all sorts, David, what....?

DA: Well, the popular interpretation, which is probably oversimplified, is that if you wanted to bring about something, you went to this fetish figure as they were called,

and hammer in a piece of iron. Whether in fact that caused somebody's death or whether it brought about good in the sense that it brought about one of your wishes, you have to go to the people to discover, and Westerners are only too prone to jump to conclusions. What's the correct answer?

HM: Well I think as far as we know, that's close to the correct answer, that it was a figure that was in the use of ritual specialists.

DA: To me, the interesting thing about that is that really, you see, it has huge power. Even as I stand here I feel I can see that. A lot of human beings'... a lot of emotion has been invested in that. Of course that's my imagination, but that's one of the great things about museums. That's why it's wonderful to come to museum like this, where you know that that's actually what it purports to be.

HM: Absolutely. I mean, it's a dialogue with the human imagination across cultures and very much a celebration of human creativity.

#### 14 The role of the artist

KJ: What is the role of the artist?

HM: It varies very much from society to society but in many West African cultures you do get people who are professional artists and craftsmen. And they are, if you like, employed by others, by members of ritual cults, or by the local aristocracy to produce carvings for particular purposes. Whereas if, say, you go to Australia and Australia Aboriginal societies, you will find that there isn't a set aside category of artist. It depends where you are. In some places the ritual expert is the artist, in other places there are craftsmen who are specially skilled and trained, really, and make their living producing what we know, or count, as works of art.

DA: And what's more, the people in their particular societies know their artists just as famously as we would know Picasso or whoever, and if you look at the end of this case,

this enormously elaborate piece of carving, of fretwork, that's not the work of an amateur, that's the work of somebody who has specialised. These come from New Ireland, which is a Melanesian group east of New Guinea, and are used in very, very complex displays in which special houses are built in which these things are displayed, to do with the ceremonies in safeguarding the eternity of the human spirit.

### 15 Transformation mask

DA: That's a transformation mask made by the same people who made the totem pole at the other end, and was employed in theatre. The Northwest Coast people are tremendous theatrical people and extraordinarily talented, so that in the great ceremonies which were held during the long, dark winter months in these great houses, spirits would come from the back, accompanied by chanting and the flickering of the fire, and this is the night, and would suddenly transform from a great beaked bird, which that is, the beak splits apart and suddenly you see a human face, this almost superhuman face with the hooked nose, painted green. The effect is dazzling. I have seen it happen and it's thrilling.

### 16 Treatment of dead enemies

DA: It should also be said that people's fascination, the European's fascination, with shrunken heads was such that everybody wanted to collect them during the nineteenth-century and indeed during this. The heads of course were skinned, the skull was taken out, then boiled and hot stones were put inside so that the flesh, the scalp shrank. But what it didn't do was to shrink the hair, so the hair is always, on these heads, very long. And it wasn't just human heads that were treated. There were animal heads which were treated this way too. There's a very interesting sloth head.

HM: I think one of the main reasons that school children come to see these displays and are so interested in them is that it's one of the few times in our society when school children are able to reflect on the nature of death and human existence, and it's something that brings out into the open things school children will have sort of fantasies in their minds [about]. And it provides a context for people to confront the reality of life and death and the way in which human beings over time have, sometimes, treated each other with much less respect than we would like.

DA: The most spectacular thing in this case to me is the central wooden figure which is the figure of a spirit with great black disc-like eyes and prongs at the bottom of this outline, from which were hung the skulls of your conquered enemies. It's a skull rack or skull suspension device. And to me, if I had to imagine what a human spirit was like, well, I guess that's as vivid an imagination as one can think of.

HM: One of the most interesting objects in this entire case is a First World War German helmet and it was taken by a Naga soldier who was working as part of the labour core with the British army during the First World War. And it shows in fact the way in which trophies of war are in some ways similar, cross-culturally. Although British soldiers didn't take the heads of their enemies, they certainly did take things that became a trophy of the victory.

## 17 Baskets

HM: Now, of course, I doubt if there are many societies in the world in which basketry was not a technique and here we can see baskets from all over the world, in particular from Southeast Asia and from Australia and from South America. And one of the interesting things about basketry is the way in which an apparently simple series of techniques can produce so many remarkably different designed objects,

both in their shape and in the designs that are painted or woven into them.

I am looking at a basket from North Queensland in Northern Australia, a bicornial basket made from Lawyer cane which is one of the most aesthetically pleasing objects in the entire museum to me.

DA: But it's also enchanting from a practical point of view because, as I understand it, one of the vegetables that the women of this particular part of the North Queensland value highly is water lily roots. So they would wade into the lagoons, or the billabongs, carrying one of these, but the weaving is so loose that the water can sluice in and out and leaving the lily roots collected inside, so it washes them but it doesn't weigh you down.

KJ: We have, in fact, a basket that actually holds water, do you know.....?

HM: We certainly have several baskets that hold water because these tightly woven baskets from Northern Australia are used not only to carry water but also to hold honey in them. And during the wet season, in Northeast Arnhem Land, honey was stored in the baskets and the baskets would then sunk in the rivers where they would have been preserved until people needed to eat the honey.

## 18 Carved ivory

KJ: Ivory is now very much out of fashion for collection and decoration.

DA: Well, it is with us, fortunately. Fortunately for the elephant. But it's still, I'm afraid, much-favoured in other parts of the world. Not so much functionally, because you could replace it functionally, but magically. But the ivory has always been a marvelous material, and interestingly enough, the Eskimos, or the Inuit to give them a more proper term, up in the North, they got ivory not from elephants but from

walruses and from narwhals. But they also found the semi-fossilized bodies of mammoths and mammoths had tusks just like elephants had tusks. So from these deep-freeze mammoths, they would take a tusk and made some of their beautiful carvings from mammoth ivory.

## 19 Dwellings

HLR: There are several cases with house models and these were actually made to show people what the houses were like. Right at one end is the model of a Bosnian peasant's dwelling which was actually provided by the museum in Herzegovina, in Sarajevo, in 1899. There are several models if you look around the houses, but this is perhaps the most magnificent of them. People love these because of all the little models, you've got the barn, and you've got the house, and you've even got the boat tethered up outside. Right at the other end of the case, you've got the lovely model from Guyana, and it's not just of the house, but of every single little bowl and plate that you'd find inside, all made to scale, and that's of course, very fascinating to any model maker.

## 20 Musical instruments

DA: Well I think the thing that delights me particularly to see what I take to be one of the very first gramophones?

HLR: That's right, it's an Edison Bell phonograph, wax cylinder, recorder and player. [Recorded music.] And it sums up, if I can quote what the General said, what he wrote, that he was collecting 'from the simple to the complex, from the homogenous to the heterogeneous'. And here you have modern, up to date modern design, when it was collected. [All laugh.]

Part of the historical development of the collections is the fact that we were collecting archaeological materials as well, and there's an example of a horn from Ireland, from the late

Bronze Age, that's between 1000-500 BC. And then you've got a *shofar* made out of ram's horn collected from a synagogue.

There's one thing here I don't think we have ever tried playing and it certainly fascinates people a lot. It's a gunpowder panpipe. [Laughter.] You put gunpowder in the middle and you fire it off and it makes a noise as it goes up.

So, you have a metatarsal bone from a deer, and this is from the Upper Paleolithic period, which is between twelve and forty thousand BC. I am afraid we don't have a precise date, because this was excavated in the nineteenth-century before they were quite so meticulous about excavating. And you might say that hole [in it] looks very haphazard. It's at the point where the bone is quite soft and often people make a hole there to get the marrow out to eat it. And a lot of research has been done (we've got five of these bone flutes here) to see if that hole was made specifically, specially, or whether it was just [made] in a gravel deposit. And in fact the consensus seems to be that they were made as a signaling instrument for these people who followed the deer, much as the Lapps do today. So, you can see one of the earliest of the sound makers. I know we keep talking about musical instruments but, in fact, it's quite difficult to know, when you have an archaeological find, if it was used musically. In fact, 'What is music?' is one of our big questions, that we have to think about with students in the department.

21 Queen Victoria

KJ: Queen Victoria?

HLR: Yes, she's wonderful, isn't she? She is actually (as far as I know), or was, carved by a Yoruba carver many years after Queen Victoria's death from a photograph.

DA: Yoruba being West Africa?

HLR: West Africa, yes. And her features are very typically Yoruba, and you can see the person wasn't terribly sure about the anatomy at the front and the costume. And the secret about Queen Victoria is that if you pick her up and look underneath, she has feet and little tiny boots.

## 22 Noh masks, Japan

HLR: We are very lucky to have this set of masks. Usually my colleagues pronounce it Noh masks from Japan, which was a highly evolved, court, dramatic form. And this was extremely popular in Japan. It's a complete set from a theatre in Tokyo and at the beginning of the Meiji era when Japan opened to the West, a lot of their traditional customs became less popular, less fashionable, because they got overwhelmed by Western drama. And at that point, the theatre closed down and the masks were sold and we were lucky enough to get the complete set. They are all in fact from different periods and masks like these are categorised by the Japanese as 'originals', of which there are very, very few, because some of these are seventeenth-century themselves. Where the eyes are gold, that often implies that the person is in fact a devil in disguise.

## 23 Balfour and Blackwood

KJ: You've been listening the words of people very much associated with the museum nowadays and you've heard about General Pitt Rivers who started it all. Time now to consider two other famous names from the past, and the portrait is of Henry Balfour.

HLR: In fact, he was employed as a first-year graduate to unpack the collections when they came here, and by 1891 he was appointed Curator.

KJ: And did he use this right at the beginning, as an educational aid for the museum?

HLR: He seems to have used it very actively. In fact the galleries were then used in the mornings for the lectures for the students.

DA: Ah, the famous name.

HLR: Beatrice Blackwood.

DA: And I am sure many of the objects from Melanesia were collected by her.

HLR: Yes, she was an avid collector. A completely fearless woman. She went into areas that were still quite dangerous. She was a very tiny person. She was still working here when I first came, and there's a marvelous story about her first contact.

DA: In eastern New Guinea, out there?

HLR: That's right. Yes. And she, I think she was the first European woman, possibly the first European, they had ever seen. And I remember her telling me that she wasn't quite sure of how to make contact because they were very fierce. And she got somebody who was supposed to be able to speak their language who took her to a trading point and she sat there and she only had with her a ball of string and a bag, and something in the bag. She unraveled the string and dangled it over the edge of the bag, and inside was a kitten. And she felt she was being watched, and indeed four warriors came out of the forest, absolutely fascinated by this magic woman, they must of thought her, playing with the little animal they have never seen, that was completely tamed. And we do have photographs of this in the archive. And the young warriors look terribly fierce when they come. And then the next photograph is one young man with an armlet with feathers on it, and on his arm is this kitten playing with the feathers, and he's got such a smile on his face (laughter).

## 24 Forster Pacific collections

HM: We have, I suppose, what is one of the most significant collections in the whole museum in that it is a collection of objects from the Pacific, that originated in Cook's voyages, and is collected by Forster, father and son.

DA: Well, this is a place of pilgrimage really for anybody who cares about the Pacific. I mean, this is one of the great historical assemblages, this is when Western European man looked for the first time on the face of the people of paradise, really. It seemed to them like paradise. In many ways, one thinks it certainly was. But here are people who had no metal, who had stone implements and produced utilitarian objects like the stool at the back there which seems to me one of the most elegant shapes ever produced by anybody.

HM: And of course a collection like this is important to show how the material culture in the region changed after European contact. And if you look at the Maori implements here, you can see the sort of slightly understated nature of the design compared with the designs that developed during the early nineteenth-century and onwards. The baler here is a classic example, I think, of an absolutely wonderful, functional object from New Zealand, beautifully crafted and yet at the same time not Baroque, not over-elaborated in any way.

It's also worth seeing this mourner's costume in the middle because there hanging around it are some of tapa cloths that we were speaking of when we first came in.

KJ: The barkcloth?

HM: It's remarkable to think of this object surviving in such incredible condition, considering how fragile it is and the material it is made of.

## 25 The Kingdom of Benin

SJ: This is a collection of materials that was brought back to Europe from West Africa in the last decade of the nineteenth-century, and it was a revelation for Europe to see this material. Very little of it was known prior to this. And the way in which these objects were made was so sophisticated that for a long time it was thought that it must be a result of early European contact with West Africa. They didn't believe that these very sophisticated techniques could have been developed there. We now know of course that they were, at a very early period.

DA: And the plaques would have hung on the pillars and on the walls, and they represent the Oba, who was king of Benin, and was a sacred being. But the real astonishment, I think, is the perfection of the bronze casting which already gives a lie to what I might have suggested, when we first met, that this was 'tribal', if you think that 'tribal' means that you don't wear any clothes and that you just have a very primitive technology. Here's a highly sophisticated technology made by a people, that was a very *numerous* people, who had a magnificent town, decorated with superb artifacts, and a very complex social system.

## 26 Shadow puppets

HLR: The collections of shadow puppets at the Pitt Rivers Museum do cover the whole range and area where they are found. Although not all of them, of course, are out. It's an area where we need a lot more space. And in the case, the shadow puppets are the Malay *Wayang Kulit*, related to the Javanese, and very much influenced by the Javanese style of *Wayang Kulit*, in other words 'shadow puppets'. The puppets themselves are made from leather which is painted in colour. And the method of lighting it very closely from behind means that a little of that colour will show on the screen itself. Now you wouldn't have those plays without

music. The gamelan and the puppets are an integral part of what it is a Wayang performance. [Music.]

## 27 Totem pole

DA: Well, there is that magnificent Northwest Coast totem pole, with the beak at the bottom.

HM: And totem poles are very much a sign of the status of a particular lineage in the Northwest Coast of America. And the totem poles represent the history of the particular group who erected them, and represent the link between them and their mythological past. So when you see something like a raven incorporated as a motif in the totem pole, then that shows that the raven ancestor was spiritually the ancestor of the human groups who then took over the land.

HLR: The totem pole has a marvelous collecting history behind it in that we know exactly, obviously, which village it comes from and we have a photograph of it in its original site. We did in fact learn a little bit more about it by accident, partly because a little boy came and studied it very carefully and noticed the lack of... if you look at the photograph, it has nine hats, if you look at the totem pole there are only five. And he went to speak to the curator about it and there was nothing in the documentation, which was very complete indeed. The totem pole we know was put up by the senior person in the village, to celebrate a *potlatch*, a big celebration party. The chief had had so many potlatch, he'd had nine, which is an incredible number. And some years later, an old lady came to the museum, from the same village, and as a child she remembered the totem pole going and she remembers they decided it would be quite suitable to sell this totem pole to Oxford. And then came the problem, because how many hats should Oxford have? And they thought about that, evidently for quite some weeks, and in

the end they chopped four off. [General laughter.] Yes, and Oxford was only a five hat university. [Laughter.]

## 28 Netsuke (Japanese toggles)

DA: Netsuke were these toggles, weren't they? They were little ivory..... big buttons as it were, and you stuffed it through your waistband and at one end there would be a box or *inro*, I think, and then the netsuke at the top was a toggle to prevent it from slipping out again. And they took the opportunity to carve these netsuke into the most inventive little miniatures, carvings, I think probably anywhere in the world.

HLR: They are the most wonderful, educational teaching resource on Japanese tradition, in both myth and legend: lots of lovely stories like the badger teapot, that you might be able to find. This is a marvelous story about a poor couple who get visited by a god and they get given a teapot and when they put it on the fire it changes into a badger. So the poor man, who is the only person willing to give this strange poor visitor some food, then becomes very rich because he has a performing teapot. [Laughter.]

## 29 Surgical treatment

DA: This is the most gruesome section that you can find in any museum anywhere. Surgical instruments. How people remained alive after these kinds of treatments one cannot imagine. But extraordinarily enough, of course, as this says here, people have done things to one another to try to alleviate diseases since prehistory. And here's some skulls from the Andes, showing that there was an operation on the skull, presumably for some dreadful headache or other, but the astounding thing to me is that you can see from the edge of the bone that the person lived long enough for the bone to grow over and soften the edges. So that the person,

having had this hole cut in his or her head, then lived for months and months, if not years.

### 30 Traps

DA: Making a good trap involves not only knowing how to make natural materials make all kinds of springs and nooses and so on, but also know a great deal about the habits of the animals concerned. To know what it is that is going to draw them into the trap. So that, for example, here there is a Chinese, bamboo, flea trap. Well, I bet not many of us know the habits of fleas well enough to know how to design that and, quite honestly, I have no idea what would entrap the flea into that extraordinary construction.

[Laughter.]

HLR: Well there's a sweet sticky mass in the middle.

DA: Oh, I see. [Laughter.]

HL: And the Mandarin would put that trap up his sleeve.

[Laughter.] It's to trap the human flea because he has a sweet tooth.

DA: Oh Yes, I see. And that is a cockroach trap of grass from Jamaica.

KJ: A triple mousetrap from Wantage?

HLR: Yes, I am not quite sure why one mouse after another would be caught. I mean, surely one mouse would put the other two off?

DA: Maybe the squeak? But there again, that is the kind of bit of expertise which we have lost but which local people will know very well.

### 31 Firearms

DA: One of the significant things about the firearms collection here is that it exemplifies General Pitt-Rivers' original interest in collecting. He began by collecting firearms and this was the direct outcome of his having been invited by the British government to look into ways of

improving the British army musket and in order to do this he began to collect firearms to see how improvements had been made over a period of time by a lot of small changes. And this of course fitted in very much with nineteenth-century ideas about progress and evolution, that gradual changes had taken place over a long time and in all sorts of fields. So then he went on to collect all sorts of other things. But the firearms collection was his original interest.

## 32 Conclusion

MOH: This presentation is intended merely as a taste of the collections which also include over two hundred thousand historical photographs. But the presentation isn't a guide to what's on display today because our displays are always being altered, quite contrary to the popular belief that the Pitt Rivers never changes. New displays are being created, and individual objects are removed from display, sometimes for conservation or loan, sometimes to make room for new acquisitions, or sometimes to reappear elsewhere. And inevitably many highly significant objects which could have been included have been left out, but perhaps will one day form the basis of a sequel.

However, if this presentation tempts you to find out more about the museum and its collections, our website will give you access to a wealth of further information, with links to additional sites created for the range of current research projects carried out by museum staff. So we do hope that you'll continue to explore the collections, wherever you happen to be.

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### **33 Image Captions**

The accession numbers provided here can be used to access the object records in the online version of the Museum's databases at <http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/databases.html>.

#### **Introduction**

1. The Museum in 2009
2. Teaching in the Museum in 2006 (1998.356.23.6)
3. The Clore Leaning Balcony in 2009
4. Teaching in the Museum in October 2009

#### **Historical Views**

1. View from the entrance in 2009
2. The Museum in 2008
3. The Museum in the 1890s (1998.267.94.1)
4. General Pitt-Rivers, aged about 40 (1998.271.6)
5. General Pitt-Rivers, aged about 65 (1998.271.66)
6. The Museum in the late 1890s (1998.267.95.5)
7. The Museum in the 1900s (1998.267.269.9)
8. The Museum in the 1900s (1998.267.262.6)
9. The Museum pre 1960s
10. The 'Human Form in Art' case pre 1960s

#### **Lamps**

1. Lamps made of recycled materials, from left to right:
  - 1a. From India (1998.25.24)
  - 1b. From Uganda (private collection)
  - 1c. From Burkina Faso (1992.38.1)
  - 1d. From South Africa (1966.3.61)
  - 1e. From India (1998.25.28)
  - 1f. From Thailand (1902.88.478)
  - 1g. From India (1998.25.29)
  - 1h. From India (1998.25.22)

2. Pottery lamp, from Algeria (1932.88.303)
3. Parrot-fish lamp, from Japan (190.32.10)
4. Delft-ware lantern, from Holland (1917.14.17)
5. Pottery lamp, from Iran (1932.88.307)

## **Weaving**

1. Naga woman weaving, India, 1922–23 (1998.484.13)
2. Warp *ikat* cloth, from Sarawak (1970.32.128)
3. Tapestry panel, from Ancient Peru (1952.7.69)
4. Detail of Quecha woman's dress, from Bolivia (1949.6.1)
5. Weaver at work in Oman in April 1978 (2004.51.39)
6. Weaver at work in Oman in April 1978 (2004.51.12)
7. Weaver at work in Guatemala in 1940 (1946.8.41)
8. Woollen shawl from Mexico (1946.6.8)
9. Length of *kente* cloth, from Ghana (1948.2.4)
10. Cotton blanket, from India (2008.70.38)
11. Cotton blouse, from Guatemala (1982.15.2)

## **Barkcloth**

1. Barkcloth, from Polynesia (Samoa?) (2006.76.1)
2. Barkcloth, from Niue, Polynesia (1887.1.561)
3. Women beating bark, in Papua New Guinea (BB.P.11.499)
4. Women beating bark, in Papua New Guinea (BB.P.11.380)
5. Barkcloth, from Vanuatu, Melanesia (1900.9.11)
6. Barkcloth, from Fiji (1914.56.34)
7. Book of barkcloth samples (1908.28.1)
8. Sample in barkcloth book (1908.28.1)

## **Feathered Cloaks**

1. Feathered cloak, from Hawai'i (1934.76.2)
2. Feathered cloak, from Hawai'i (1951.10.61)

## Pottery

1. Painted pottery bowl, from New Mexico, USA; Pueblo (1928.9.1)
2. Painted pottery vessel, from northern Nigeria; Nupe (1904.54.51.1)
3. Potter at work in Papua New Guinea in 1911–12 (1998.169.4.3)
4. Potter at work in Papua New Guinea in 1911–12 (1998.169.4.5)
5. Potter at work in Papua New Guinea in 1911–12 (1998.169.4.6)

## Boats and Navigation

1. Model outrigger canoe, from Micronesia (1884.81.23)
2. Double-outrigger in Zanzibar in 1905 (1998.193.12)
3. Canoe with outrigger in Fiji in 1870s (1998.159.8.2)
4. Canoe in Woodlands, North America, around 1900 (1998.159.18.1)
5. Sailing chart, from the Marshall Islands, Micronesia (1897.1.2)
6. Quadrant, from England (1895.45.2)
7. Model of Captain Cook's *Resolution* (1972.27.1)
8. Sailing canoe, in Papua New Guinea in 1880s (1998.159.13.1)
9. Outrigger canoe in Papua New Guinea in 1911–12 (1998.159.15.4)
10. Model Viking ship, from Norway (1884.54.37)
11. Model Inuit woman's boat, from Greenland (1884.81.40)
12. Model Haida canoe, from western Canada (1911.79.1)

## Arctic Clothing

1. Inuit woman's costume, from Greenland (1992.29.1)
2. Close-up of Inuit woman's costume, from Greenland (1992.29.1)
3. Cloak made of seal intestine, from the Aleutian Islands (1886.1.871)
4. Inuit hunters at ice-hole, in Nunavut, Canada in 1998–90 (2007.47.29.89)
5. Preparing a seal-skin, in Nunavut, Canada in 1998–90 (2007.47.28.92)

6. Jacket made of seal intestine, from the Aleutian Islands (1908.73.1)
7. Inuit jacket made of seal intestine, from Baffin Island, Canada (1925.11.3)

### **Magic, Charms and Witchcraft**

1. Fishing charms, from Great Yarmouth, England (1923.32.1–.6)
2. 'Hand of Fatima' amulet, from Tunisia (1917.9.74)
3. Haida carved salmon, from Canada (1891.49.35)
4. Amulet, from Aleppo in Syria (1956.10.1)
5. Mask, from Sri Lanka (1899.88.1)
6. Figure made to deter evil spirits, from the Nicobar Islands (1983.7.1)
7. A supposed 'witch's ladder', from Somerset (1911.32.8)
8. Museum labels
9. Glass bottle said to contain a witch, from Hove, Sussex (1926.6.1)
10. Label for bottle said to contain a witch
11. Mandrake root, from Turkey (1891.43.1)
12. Slug on a thorn, from Oxfordshire (1898.71.1)
13. Water diviner's twig, from Wiltshire (1915.33.1)

### **Ancient Egypt**

1. Mummified crocodile (1908.64.6)
2. Mask from a mummy covering (1928.43.1)
3. Stone scarab (1952.5.80)
4. Bronze figure of a cat (1884.58.79)
5. Detail of inner lid of coffin (1887.1.481)

### **Craftsmanship and Art**

1. Yoruba post, by Olowe of Ise, Nigeria (1969.25.1)
2. Yoruba house-post in the 1930s–1940s (1998.194.178)
3. Chair, from Bamenda, Cameroon (1942.13.1663)
4. Mavungu, Kongo power-figure, from Africa (1900.39.70)

5. Mavungu, second view (1900.39.70)
6. Mavungu, on display around 1910 (1998.267.262.5)
7. Yoruba figure of colonial officer, from Nigeria (1981.12.1)
8. Painting by Judy Napangardi Watson, from Australia (1994.43.1)
9. Bamenda mask, from Cameroon (1942.13.417)
10. Malangan figure, from New Ireland (1899.62.402)
11. Haida mask, by Charles Edenshaw, from Canada (1891.49.8)

## **Treatment of the Dead**

1. Two *tsantsas*, from Ecuador (1932.32.92, 1911.77.1)
2. Two *tsantsas*, second view (1932.32.92, 1911.77.1)
3. Naga head-hunting trophy, from north-east India (1923.84.827)
4. Skull-rack, from Papua New Guinea (1905.63.7)
5. Naga dance hat, made from German helmet (1928.69.200)

## **Baskets**

1. Man weaving basket in Surinam in 1964 (2001.33.943.1)
2. Basket from Darfur, Sudan (2001.77.12)
3. Water-tight basket, from Colombia (1991.7.1)
4. Basket, from Sarawak, Malaysia (1901.25.2)
5. Basket from Queensland, Australia (1893.38.24)
6. Aboriginal woman in Victoria, Australia in 1887–88 (1998.249.42.1)
7. Dilly basket, from Northern Territory, Australia (1900.55.217)
8. Dilly basket, from Northern Territory, Australia (1900.55.218)

## **Carved Ivory**

1. Twelve carved ivory balls from China (1886.1.93)
2. Ivory comb from India (1884.71.79)
3. Scrimshaw work, from England (1936.26.31)
4. Model in ivory of reindeer sledge, etc. from Siberia (1884.1.6)
- 5a. Comb of mammoth ivory, from Siberia (1915.50.77)
- 5b. Scoop of mammoth ivory, from Alaska (1914.79.1)

5c. Calendar of mammoth ivory, from Siberia (1915.50.79)

### **Dwellings**

1. Model house, from Bosnia and Herzegovina (1899.39.1)
2. Model house, from Guyana (1886.1.920)

### **Musical Instruments**

1. Phonograph, from New Jersey, USA (1951.10.37, 1951.10.41)
2. Bronze Age trumpet, from Ireland (1884.112.2)
3. A *shofar*, from Syria (1938.34.74)
4. Gunpowder panpipes, from Burma (1916.10.14)
5. Upper Palaeolithic whistle, from France (1909.4.1)
6. Detail (1909.4.1)

### **Queen Victoria**

Yoruba figure of Queen Victoria, from Nigeria (1965.10.1)

### **Noh Masks, Japan**

1. Mask of a god incarnated as an old man (1884.114.9)
2. Mask of an unidentified character (1884.114.50)
3. Mask of an acolyte (1884.114.34)
4. Mask of an angry female spirit (1884.114.56)

### **Pitt Rivers Staff**

1. Balfour in Upper Gallery in the 1890s (1998.267.94.5)
2. Portrait of Balfour, around 1910 (1998.356.17.1)
3. Henry Balfour (centre) with students in 1908 (1998.266.3)
4. Beatrice Blackwood in Canada in 1925 (BB.A.3.102)
5. Anga men and kitten in Papua New Guinea in 1936 (BB.P.11.1001)

## **The Forsters' Pacific Collection, 1772–75**

1. Maori *hei-tiki* pendant, from New Zealand (1886.1.1167)
2. Wooden figure, from Tahiti (1886.1.1424)
3. Maori whalebone weapon, from New Zealand (1886.1.1147)
4. Wooden headrest, from Tonga (1886.1.1419)
5. Maori adze, from New Zealand (1886.1.1159)
6. Maori knife, from New Zealand (1886.1.1161)
7. Maori canoe baler, from New Zealand (1886.1.1264)
8. Chief mourner's dress, from Tahiti (1886.1.1637)

## **Kingdom of Benin**

1. Carved ivory tusk, from Benin, Nigeria (1991.13.1)
2. Shrine in Benin City in July 1935 (1998.194.79)
3. Ivory head, from Benin, Nigeria (1991.13.5)
4. Brass plaque, from Benin, Nigeria (1991.13.8)
5. Brass hip mask, from Benin, Nigeria (1900.39.6)

## **Shadow Puppets**

1. Shadow-puppet, from Malaysia (1947.10.11)
2. Shadow-puppet, from Singapore (1899.58.1)
3. Shadow-puppet, from Malaysia (1947.10.10)

## **The Totem Pole**

1. The Haida totem pole in about 1901 (1998.267.269.9)
2. Close-up of the totem pole (1901.39.1)
3. Massett village, Haida Gwaii in 1882 (1998.255.13)
4. The totem-pole in the Museum in 2009

## **Netsuke (Japanese toggles)**

1. Figure of a farming god (1932.32.23)
2. Nine masks (1932.32.41)
3. Chinese temple (1980.34.1844)
4. Badger tea pot (1980.34.272)

## **Surgical Treatment**

- 1a. Arrow head, from Congo (1936.32.1)
- 1b. Home-made hypodermic syringe, from China (1908.1.1)
- 1c. Surgical knife, from Australia (1900.55.234)
2. Stone knives, from Australia (1900.55.182 and 1903.39.40.1)
3. Trepanned skull, from Peru (1905.82.2)

## **Traps**

1. Flea-trap, from China (1925.19.1)
2. Cockroach-trap, from Jamaica (1884.117.104)
3. Mouse-trap, from Wantage, Oxfordshire (1911.63.1)

## **Selection of Firearms**

1. Crossbow, from Germany (1884.16.12)
2. Revolver pistol, from Europe (1884.27.88)
3. Baker rifle, from London (1884.27.39)
4. Pair of flintlock pistols, from Bristol (1933.41.1)
5. Brown Bess musket, from England (1884.27.38)

## **Conclusion**

1. 'Shields' display, opened 1995
2. Planning a new display in 2001
3. 'Body Arts' displays, opened 2002
4. New 'Animal Form in Art' display, opened 2009
5. Clore Learning Balcony , opened 2009
6. New entrance way, opened 2009