Digitising the Singer Archive

Julia Nicholson: curator interview

Museum on the move

J G Wood’s ethnographic collection
I am delighted to report that the Museum had over 430,000 visitors in the past year, an all-time record. We also had over 1.2 million online visits from 206 countries and territories. One special visitor was Friends’ Patron Sir David Attenborough who came to the Museum in April to open the new Cook case. This dazzling display with over 200 objects collected on Cook’s first two voyages was extensively researched by Jeremy Coote and Jeremy Uden. Meanwhile, technician Alan Cooke gave a presentation on mount-making skills used in setting up the Cook display at the Cleveland International Mount Makers Forum. Work is well under way in selecting objects for new archaeology displays and the recently-installed Stone Tools case is well worth a visit.

Three temporary exhibitions have opened, most prominently the photographs of Kabuki Theatre, the popular Japanese drama style, in the Long Gallery. Established around 400 years ago, it still thrives today. As reported on p4 a dedicated team have been hard at work moving over 110,000 objects from our off-site storage to a new facility.

Two staff members were awarded Oxford University Museums Partnership Innovation Fund Awards. Beth Asbury’s Celebrating Diversity project involves setting up the first cross-museum LGBT tour, while Carly Smith-Huggins’ project experiments with creative apps for family visits. In June we secured Oxford Innovation funding for new mobile platforms allowing students, researchers and diaspora community members to ‘self-curate’ their alternative interpretations of objects and places.

Laura van Broekhoven, Museum Director

The VERVE team has been firing on all cylinders with outreach and special exhibitions. We are also preparing for new Upper Gallery displays using the Museum’s archaeological collections. This being PRM, the display is organised by material, with cases highlighting archaeological finds in stone, metals, textiles, glass, organics, and even contemporary materials found in excavations. Archaeology lecturer-curator Dan Hicks, together with VERVE team members Madeline Ding and Sian Mundell, have searched the database and storage areas to come up with an exciting list of treasures. What will we see? Wonderful things... The displays will be installed in autumn 2016.

Laura Peers, Interim VERVE Project Manager

The polished glossy magazine that you are now reading originated as a photocopied Newsletter in 1992. It was the brainchild of Felicity Wood, who appointed the first editor Janet Ridout Sharpe and acted as commissioning editor (and paper-folder!) herself. This is only one of the many major contributions Felicity has made to the life, structure and effectiveness of the Friends since she joined under the founding chairman, Kenneth Kirkwood in the mid-1980s after spending some years in SE Asia. Felicity was Secretary and acted as commissioning editor (and paper-folder!) herself. This is only one of the many major contributions Felicity has made to the life, structure and effectiveness of the Friends since she joined under the founding chairman, Kenneth Kirkwood in the mid-1980s after spending some years in SE Asia. Felicity was Secretary and Membership Secretary for five years, during which time she doubled the membership from 100 to 200; she was Chair from 2011-2014.

However, her most influential role has been her 26-year-long responsibility for Friends’ activities. She set out to enrich the spectrum of events, re-establishing some that had been dropped and instigating others. The shape of our programme of Away Days, Behind the Scenes visits and lectures is entirely due to her organisational skills, initiative and energy. Her quiet reliability has also contributed to events run by other people, from the Beatrice Blackwood lecture to the Christmas party.

Felicity has now retired from this exacting role. We say farewell to her with great gratitude, and look forward to seeing her at future events. We warmly welcome her successor, Claudette Sherlock (pictured above right). Claudette graduated in Dutch literature and linguistics at the University of Amsterdam and is a multilingual translator. She lives in Oxford, and came to love the PRM through visits with her teenage daughter.

Gillian Morriss-Kay, Chair of the Friends

Cover image: Maliah Khond brass figures from the exhibition Made for Trade 1894.32.1.1, 1894.32.1.2

Juliette Gammon, Editor
Julia Nicholson – Curator and Joint Head of Collections

In 1994, Julia Nicholson and her husband Jeremy Coote took up this post as a job-share. In the summer, I talked to Julia about what she did, and how the job had altered since she came to the PRM. What I got was a lesson in not only how the Pitt Rivers had kept itself up to date, but how running a museum had changed beyond measure since she arrived. Her answers to my questions are illustrated by pieces from some of the special exhibitions Julia has curated and outward loans she has organised.

What is your role as Joint Head of Collections and how does the job-share work?
My particular geographical interest is India, which relates to my previous post with Leicester Museums where I worked with South Asian communities in the city and made collections in Gujarat, notably of textiles. In contrast, Jeremy has strong research interests in Africa and the Pacific. What we have tended to do, however, is to treat each piece of a work as a project on which one or other of us takes the lead. Our main responsibility though is not geographically or culturally specific. We oversee arrangements for research visitors studying objects from the collections, the ongoing documentation of the collections, the acquisition of new displays and special exhibitions, and the administration of loans to other institutions around the world. A particularly important aspect of our role is ensuring that the Museum meets all the standards expected of a major institution. Most recently this involved working on policy documents to meet Arts Council England’s ‘Accreditation’ standard – tedious but necessary!

How has the Museum changed over the last 20 years?
The visitor today will get a similar impression to one visiting 20 years ago, but the detail is completely different. The Museum itself has a remodelled entrance with new showcases around the platform, while many old cases have subtle changes such as header titles. It is hard to believe that many were untitled until 2003. Behind the scenes, however, the Museum is unrecognisable, mainly because of its wonderful new building, but also because of its new database and strong online presence. When I first arrived, information about the collections was in handwritten registers, paper files, and index cards with very little on the single PRM computer. Much of this information has been digitised and stored, many with images, in our massive database which now contains records for the 300,000+ objects in the collections and which is mainly available online.

What are the main challenges the PRM now faces?
The same challenges that it has always faced: it needs ever-larger amounts of money just to stand still. The most pressing challenge currently, however, is to move more than 100,000 items from their current storage building in Osney to different premises.

What have been the highlights of your time here?
It is nice to end with an easy question. The answer is simple: curating new displays and special exhibitions. Over the years, I have been responsible for a number of these, including ‘Treasured Textiles: Cloth and Clothing Around the World’ (2006–2008), ‘Made for Trade’ (2011–2013) and, most recently, ‘My Siberian Year’ (1914–1915) about Maria Czaplicka and her intrepid expedition to Siberia. My favourite exhibition though was ‘Transformations: The Art of Recycling’ (2000–2002), which combined contemporary artworks with recycled artefacts from the Museum’s collections. Some Friends may remember Pansy the dog who welcomed you on entering the show, made by artist Justine Smith from old Beano comics.

Interview by Jonathan Bard, Friend and Emeritus Professor, University of Edinburgh

Clockwise from top left: Julia with Uzbek hat from Sheila Paine exhibition Stitch of a Symbol; Kongo drum, loaned to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY for the exhibition Kongo: Power and Majesty 1884.109.15; String of glass beads made in Venice and exported to East Africa from the exhibition Made for Trade 1971.15.995; ‘Pansy’ by Justine Smith featured in Transformations: The Art of Recycling
Museum on the move

As the country prepares to leave the EU the Museum is preparing for its own major exit. While well known for its dense displays of more than 30,000 objects, it is less well known that the majority of the collection is stored off-site. The largest off-site facility houses more than 100,000 objects including some of the Museum’s most valued and fragile items. This is the biggest (and possibly most daunting) project any of the Museum’s staff has ever worked on. It is also the largest cross-museum project undertaken by the University. The Museum of the History of Science, Ashmolean and Oxford University Museum of Natural History all have collections stored here. However, the Pitt Rivers occupies the most space with the largest number of objects.

Collections began arriving at the current store in February 1973 when they were moved from 18 Parks Road. Since 1973 generations of conservation, technical and collections staff worked there achieving great things with very little time and minimal supplies. Past projects included work on barkcloth, arrows, shields, amulets and ceramics. However, until now it has not been possible to really focus on the store as a whole.

Work began in earnest in January with the appointment of Andrew Hughes as Team Leader and Meghan O’Brien Backhouse and Ashleigh Sheppard as Project Assistants. Working conditions were not ideal with no daylight and fingers numb with cold. In June the team were boosted by six new members of staff – Bethany Skuce, Carys Wilkins, Ben Hill, Alicia Bell, Rory McDaid and Joanna Cole.

The Museum’s annual report for 1972-73 shows that store moves have not changed much. “In the late Autumn 18 Parks Road became the scene of a kind of penal servitude. The two Assistant Curators became almost first time inmates ... sorting, packing and carrying specimens in the ill-lit, filthy, and often extremely cold recesses of this old house.”

While not without its problems and discomfort this move is a wonderful opportunity for the Museum to improve access to the collections. Over the next year and a half each object will be photographed and enhancements made to its documentation. This will facilitate future retrieval for research, exhibitions, loans, conservation and teaching and will enable the Museum to provide researchers with improved information about the objects in its collections. And, more simply, we will know where everything is and that it is stored appropriately.

We have been able to unpack objects which have spent the last 40 years wrapped in pages of the Oxford Mail or stored in plastic potato bags and nest them in acid-free tissue inside an acid-free box. It is not a lack of love for the collections that prevented this work in the past, purely time and funding.

One of our biggest ‘problems’ is the spear collection. It appears that the stairs to the floor where these are stored were reconfigured after they arrived. Ignoring the fact that the spears are sharp and unwieldy at the best of times, it is now impossible to get them out by the same route.

This move has had an impact on the whole Museum and many staff and volunteers have worked to make boxes, sort collections and line bags with jiffy foam for smaller objects. The mats are too fragile and complex to be packed at the stores and have been brought up to the main Museum to be worked on by members of the Conservation department.

We hope the collections will be packed and ready to move by November 2017 to the sub-basement of the Radcliffe Science Library where we look forward to welcoming the Friends. Until then please follow our progress on Twitter (@pitt_stores) and through the Object Collections blog http://pittrivers-object.blogspot.co.uk

Marina de Alarcon
Deputy Head of Collections
Man and his handiwork: the ethnographic collection of J G Wood

Twenty-odd years ago when I was leading a group of students round the Museum looking for Native American artefacts, a tiny object caught my eye among a display of traps in the Lower Gallery. Rather, its label did: the handwritten tag attached to the grass cockroach trap included the words ‘J.G. Wood Coll.’ This was none other than the Rev. John George Wood (1827-1889), my childhood hero on account of his many inspirational books on natural history. J G Wood was a pioneer among writers of popular natural history and it is recorded that his Common Objects of the Countryside (1858) sold 100,000 copies within a week of publication.

Not content with the natural history of plants and animals, he published a two-volume work on The Natural History of Man in 1870, followed by Man and His Handiwork in 1886. In order to write these, he amassed an ethnographic collection and when this was dispersed part of it came to the Pitt Rivers Museum. The Museum’s website lists no fewer than 166 objects that were once owned by Wood, 20 of which are on display. The documented history of the cockroach trap shows that it was displayed at the Bethnal Green Museum (now the Museum of Childhood) from 1878 and was transferred to the South Kensington Museum (now the V&A) before forming part of the Pitt Rivers founding collection in Oxford in 1884. It is possible that the two men were acquainted since Pitt-Rivers’ own collection was loaned to the Bethnal Green Museum in 1874 and was also moved to Kensington before reaching Oxford.

Wood’s ethnographic books are beautifully illustrated with detailed engravings of objects which were not limited to his own collection. Although he may have had reservations about Darwin’s theory of evolution, he made much of the concept of progression from simple to complex and embraced the General’s system for Man and his Handiwork which is ordered according to artefact type and not geographical origin. The illustrations in Man and His Handiwork are not acknowledged in my edition and appear to have been prepared by several hands. Some carry the name ‘Dalziel’, the Brothers Dalziel being a well-known firm of Victorian engravers. Their work includes the portrait of a ‘Marquesan chief’ with a neck ornament similar to one formerly owned by J G Wood and now in the PRM (1884.77.19).

Wood was a remarkable man. He developed a passion for natural history as a child living in Oxford, received his degree at Merton College, and was ordained at 25 – although he seems to have spent much more time writing than undertaking pastoral work. He eventually wrote over 70 books, many of which went into several editions. At the age of 50 he embarked on another career, that of public lecturer in both this country and the USA, and illustrated his talks in that pre-Powerpoint age with coloured chalk drawings. He is often portrayed as a chronic workaholic but I think he had a sense of fun too. He was not averse to putting the objects in his collection to practical use. He and a friend once hunted snipe in the New Forest using knobkerries and, describing the efficacy of a Japanese snow cloak made of grass (in the Pitt Rivers Museum although unfortunately not on display) he casually added “I often wore it in bad weather”. Nowadays his books are not considered ‘scientific’ but his engaging narratives and his sheer enthusiasm inspired at least one small girl to study zoology.

Janet Ridout Sharpe, Friend
Digitising the Singer Archive

Today André Singer is President of the Royal Anthropological Institute and a respected documentary producer and director. In 1975 he was researcher on a fascinating film for Granada’s Disappearing World series, The Making of the Reth which described the ceremonies of the Shilluk people in southern Sudan leading to the anointing of a new Reth or King. In 2009 he donated his archive of photographic slides taken at the time of filming to the Pitt Rivers Museum.

I have so much enjoyed digitising and documenting André Singer’s 1975 slides of the Shilluk people which will soon go online as an important part of the Museum’s extensive photographic archive of South Sudan. They will be available via the research section of the website. By a curious coincidence, the oldest image in the collection is of a Shilluk warrior, taken by the Austrian explorer Richard Buchta almost 100 years earlier in 1877.

André’s photographs were handed to me in hanging files, 24 slides per file, each snug in its transparent pocket, numbered 1 to 552. My first job was to transfer the old slide technology to a digital format. Copying them in batches of 12 through a specialised machine, each group of 12 taking about 20 minutes to copy, was quite a slow process. Once digitised, however, I could begin the documentation. A brilliant research template created by the photography department allowed me to describe many details of where, when and how each image was taken, and what was depicted. It was really helpful to find that André had written a few words on many of his slides so I could locate them in time and place, and of course André himself was a great resource as he relived his Shilluk trip of 40 years before. I also watched the documentary, and read articles on the ceremony. In that way I was able to get a deeper understanding of this complex story.

Shilluk political organisation consists of royalty, priests, chiefs and commoners. North and South Shilluk have a traditional rivalry, so the Kingship alternates, to keep the peace. Living in his raised compound, the Reth is a revered figure. People take off their shoes to enter, men leave their spears behind, and all speak a special court language. Chickens cannot be kept there, or women give birth. In order for a chief to become Reth, he must be possessed by the spirit of Nyikang, the 16th century hero who conquered and unified the land and people. Priests collect Nyikang’s spirit from the Nile, and make ostrich feather effigies of him and his tall warrior son Dak. Then the highly orchestrated and symbolic rituals to create the new Reth can begin. Each village has special responsibilities. Rare antelope are killed, their skins made for the royal family, and ritual objects including ivory bracelets are gathered.

Once everything is in place, an 80-mile pilgrimage begins from north to south, taking 10 days. The effigies follow the footsteps of Nyikang’s original journey. Each village has a shrine to Nyikang, and priests bless the people, who sing his praises. Three days before the final rituals, the Reth goes into hiding. Now battle is engaged between the northern Shilluk representing Nyikang, whose aim is to capture the Reth, and the southern group who are the Reth’s army. These are mock battles, the warriors use maize stalks instead of spears, there is dancing, and name-calling between the sides. The northern Shilluk succeed in capturing the Reth, then southern Shilluk defeat the northern warriors and Nyikang’s spirit enters the Reth to create the divine kingship. The chiefs have one last opportunity to advise the new Reth how to rule wisely, before they and the rest of the Shilluk people submit to his commands.

Patti Langton, Research Associate, Friend

All images: © Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford
The conjuring of distant memories through the images of transparencies and film is an extraordinary thing; and it has been a huge pleasure assisting Patti Langton in the cataloguing and preparation of my collection of Shilluk transparencies, covering the installation of the Reth (King) of the Shilluk of the Southern Sudan, for scholarly and general access. Seeing the Pitt Rivers, a Museum I have always loved, build up and make accessible their photographic collections to complement their extraordinary treasures is a singular delight.

I had vicariously lived with the Shilluk during my student days in Oxford having the South Sudanese experts, Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard (EP), who wrote about the Shilluk, as supervisor, and Godfrey Lienhardt, who wrote about adjacent groups, as a tutor and friend. Colleagues and visitors from the Sudan wove their way through the Institute of Social Anthropology and the Pitt Rivers Museum in those heady days of the late 1960s and early 70s and it was there that I first met Shilluk Walter Kunijwok. He was working on a Shilluk folklore thesis while navigating the turbulent and endlessly changing political waters of north-south Sudanese politics.

A few years later, in a new professional incarnation working as a TV researcher on Disappearing World, when I put a proposal to director Chris Curling for a documentary on the transition of ‘divinity’ to a new Reth, I turned to Walter to help us with his inside expertise and access. What anthropologists Sir James Frazer, EP, Godfrey Lienhardt and Paul Howell had discussed in the literature was about to happen before our cameras for the first time; and with Paul, who had also been a District Officer in the Sudan, and Walter as guides, I was fortunate to have the best possible advice to comprehend a phenomenon previously not recorded on film. Of course nothing proved easy.

Walter and I met Ayang Anei Kur, chosen to be the next Reth, in Fashoda (now Kodok) and gained his approval to film the forthcoming rituals. A film crew subsequently arrived and we began recording initial preparations for the ceremonies that had been carefully arranged to take place a week after our arrival. Elders and priests then began to work out the details and immediately disagreed among each other about processes and precedents. Arguments broke out about what colour calf should be sacrificed and who should lead different processions. The Reth-designate, a young and inexperienced man, could lend no authority or guidance and in the end it was decided that the date chosen for the installation was wrong and the ceremony would be postponed to the following month.

A hot and frustrated film team retreated to the relative calmness of London, returning a month later for the ceremonials and rituals; and at last we were able to follow the effigies representing the symbolic journey of Nyikang, the spirit of the founding father of the Shilluk people, and his warrior son Dak as they journeyed from one end of Shillukland to the other and as they fought their ritual battle with the Reth-elect until he was eventually installed in his capital, Fashoda.

The young Reth, Ayang Anei Kur who we filmed in 1975, died in 1992 and was followed by the current Reth, Kuongo Dak Fadiat. Oxford historian of the Sudan, Douglas Johnson, met the new and modernised Reth, (a banker) who has had to steer his people through the recent turbulent years of violence and independence. His position has nonetheless survived despite threats to overthrow him because of dissent over the South Sudanese government policy of dividing up Shillukland land.

The strength of the spirit of the founding King Nyikang clearly stills retains its unifying power today.

André Singer
President, The Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland; Adjunct Professor of Anthropology, University of Southern California, Los Angeles and CEO of Spring Films, London
Favourite thing: a wild ride

Myths and legends created the idea of the Wild West that many of us grew up with. Rawhide, The Magnificent Seven and Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, presented us with romantic stories. Given the lack of verifiable history from the Wild West of the early 20th century, it is no wonder that a plain, mahogany-coloured leather saddle in Case 59 of the Court has an error-strewn ticket that spins a mythical tale. The eye-catching script reveals that this saddle “Originally belonged to a member of the Hole in the Wall tribe [sic] who was wanted on a murder charge.” The most famous members of the Hole in the Wall Gang were Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. Could this saddle have been used by one of them?

The ticket states the saddle was used by Professor J A Douglas in the Andes, 1910-1912. The PRM website reveals more information. Initially the saddle was thought to have been bought by Douglas from an outlaw who was ‘lent’ a fresh horse so he could make his getaway after committing a robbery. Douglas’ son James has explained that this was not quite the truth. During geological surveying the Professor had acquired the saddle from a James Hutcheon, who was indeed making a hurried exit from the country. The saddle was given in part-exchange, along with his mule, to the Professor, who gave Hutcheon a fresh, but inferior, mule and saddle.

Does this beautiful saddle in Case 59 have any connection with Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid? It is possible. In Search of Butch Cassidy by Larry Pointer reveals that while in Bolivia those bandits worked for a James Hutcheon, driving and riding with his stagecoaches. But this Hutcheon was a well-respected businessman, so why would he be on the run?

If only that saddle could tell us the truth.

Wendy Tobbitt, Friend

A Swiss matchlock musket

The Museum possesses a superb matchlock musket preserved in almost unused condition. Although of a military pattern, its fine quality and inlaid bone decoration indicate that it is not a simple combat weapon. Germanic in style, the distinctive flaring butt relates it to a number of comparable guns in the Historical Museum in Bern which bear Swiss control marks and engraved dates from the first quarter of the 17th century; they are described as Zielmusketen – ‘target muskets’. The Pitt Rivers’ piece was thus most likely manufactured somewhere in the German-speaking part of Switzerland around 1610-1620. It is 63 inches in length and of 0.7 inch calibre. Louis de Gaya’s influential A Treatise of the Arms and Engines of War, published in 1678, defines the musket as:

“... a Weapon for Foot, the Barrel of which is three foot and eight inches long, mounted on a Stock of four foot and eight inches in length.”

Fourteenth and 15th century guns of all sizes were typically fired by the manual application of a piece of smouldering slow match to a touch hole communicating with the gunpowder charge in the barrel. However, a manuscript of 1411 in the Austrian National Library in Vienna already illustrates a partial mechanisation of the firing process, a pivoted arm – the “serpentine” – dipping the matchcord into priming powder contained in a flash-pan adjacent to the touch hole. This arrangement, the matchlock, had been completely superseded by more sophisticated sparking gunlocks (wheellocks and flintlocks) in Europe by about 1700, but survived into the 20th century in parts of Asia. An amusing account of a Tibetan matchlock in action in 1944 is given by Heinrich Harrer on page 37 of his classic 1953 book Seven Years in Tibet.

Michael Spencer, Friend
The Emberá of Panama

While the Pitt Rivers Museum contains literally hundreds of examples of mola textiles and necklaces made of glass and teeth from the Guna (also known as Kuna or Cuna) Indians of Panama I was very surprised to find that there is little or nothing from the country’s Emberá people. They have their own language Chocó which is not known to relate to any other Central or South American tongue. There is hardly anything in print but the Bible.

The Emberá live in the Darien province in Eastern Panama and near Lake Gatún close to the Panama Canal, having originated in Colombia where they are also still found. In both countries they traditionally live near rivers. Dugout canoes or piraguas are important to their lives and cosmology, featuring traditionally in the death and marriage rites. People could be buried in canoes and men were supposed to show they were ready to start a family by building them. Fishing provides a large part of the Emberá diet, but they also hunt with blowpipes and gather some of their food, plantains being of major importance.

Emberá houses are typically built on stilts to avoid wild animals, such as jaguar, and are open-sided with thatched palm roofing, wooden ladders for access and animals are kept on the ground floor under the living quarters. Palm is also used to create beautiful, colourful baskets of intricate patterns which are so tightly woven they can hold water. The palm is patiently gathered, stripped and coloured with natural dyes, sometimes in bright reds and yellows, although brown and black is more usual. My example was purchased on the shores of Lake Gatún near to the Panama Canal. Families make and sell baskets and masks of a dizzying array of variety and colours to sell to tourists. If you bear in mind my example is only about 2.75 inches high by 4 inches wide you can appreciate just how dense the weave is.

Traditionally men wore loincloths, which are still seen on elders and used for important occasions, while the women wore only a skirt or uhua historically made of palm fibre. Today the latter increasingly wear cotton skirts and cover their breasts following contact with other cultures. The Emberá also enjoy wearing beads and necklaces of coins and wide silver bracelets and ankle bands incised with traditional geometric designs.

One distinctive feature of the culture for both sexes is the use of jagua fruit juice in body painting for ‘temporary tattoos’ particularly for special occasions. The tattoos last at least ten days, and sometimes up to six weeks. Drawn with a thin piece of bamboo, or printed on using wooden blocks, each age group and gender apply specific designs. These are usually elaborate and delicate often using parallel lines and crosshatching around open patches of skin. No amount of scrubbing can remove the designs and the patterns are lost as the skin naturally renews itself.

Dance is very important to the culture and although men and women do dance together, most involve only women and take inspiration from the lives and habits of animals.

The Emberá have moved with the times. Active in politics and cleverly taking advantage of interest in their culture to generate cash from tourism and the sale of handicrafts, they have built schools in villages with regular visiting teachers. They have even been instrumental in helping to involve indigenous peoples in archaeology by collaborating with archaeologists over pottery the Emberá have found from prior cultures. These include the Guna* who inhabited this land before the Emberá pushed them towards the Caribbean Coast and also pottery from old Spanish towns examples of which are found in Panama and the Pitt Rivers collections.

Dawn Osborne, Friend
*See later issue
A business case

As a new Friend I have started to visit the Museum more regularly to become better acquainted with the many exhibits. Recently, I found myself peering into the dolls’ display case in the Lower Gallery, pondering a katsina doll from Arizona. I learnt with interest about the many different types in the native American Hopi culture and their use in not only play but in education. At this point my brain made one of those connections that brains sometimes do and the dolls in the display case brought to mind a matryoshka sitting on a shelf at home.

When I ran my own training and development business I worked with individuals from all around the globe. One of our programmes was designed to assist the integration of differing nationalities into a global brand. We asked each attendee to bring to London an item they felt best represented their country and explain to the group the connection. Then we created a ‘display case’ that was on show throughout our week together. Most of our delegates had not met previously and some had not spoken in front of an audience before. English was frequently a second or even third language. Yet, almost without fail, each spoke with pride and enthusiasm about the relationship between their item, their country and their culture.

Objects included model cars or national monuments, pictures, foodstuffs, sporting goods, alcohol and dolls. No bottled witches or shrunken heads admittedly, but some interesting items nonetheless. The very first was a model frog from Le Havre; the most lavish came from Egypt. At the end of the week we exchanged objects as symbols of new-found friendships.

A ‘display case’ of objects chosen to represent national identity is perhaps an odd, if not downright dubious, typology, but it served to represent a group of differing people, with varying views of the world, coming together to seek common solutions.

Nikki Wilde,
Friend

Visiting our Newbury neighbours

Last May ten Friends met for a guided tour of Sandham Memorial Chapel at Burghclere, the artist Stanley Spencer’s ‘Holy Box’, his monument to the forgotten dead of WW1. There was a hush as our guide opened the door to the small space. The walls to left and right are covered with paintings inspired by Spencer’s experience as a medical orderly in Bristol and in Macedonia. The pictures celebrate everyday routines such as kit inspection, sorting laundry, bed making, and scrubbing floors; and then, straight ahead over the altar, is a moving painting showing the resurrection of the slaughtered soldiers. Later we enjoyed other displays, the bookshop, and a sit in the sun.

After a good lunch at The Carpenter’s Arms we made the short journey to Newbury to visit the West Berkshire Museum. This is housed in the historic Cloth Hall (1626) and the Corn Store (c1725). Our Friends hosted a visit from the Friends of West Berkshire a few years ago (while their museum was undergoing renovations), so we felt it was high time we paid a return visit. We were welcomed by their Chair, Jill Hopgood, and Curator, Ruth Howard, and given a tour of the 11 galleries. The exhibitions change on a regular basis and reflect the life and history of the region. We saw, for instance, a Young Rotarians’ photographic exhibition, a sketchbook-exchange project, and Scouts’ Choice: objects from the Museum’s collections chosen by 3rd Newbury Scout Group.

Very many thanks to Rosemary Lee for arranging the visit. If anyone has suggestions for future Away Days or would like to offer to organise one, please contact Friends Events Coordinator, Claudette Sherlock, at cashierlock@gmail.com

Felicity Wood
Friend
PittFest: archaeology games

PittFest 2016 was a huge success! Over 2,000 people enjoyed the many activities at this archaeology-themed event. From the mummification station where you could make your own mumified cat badge, to working replicas of traps, the ever popular storyteller, Sulgrave Manor’s costumed staff with Tudor games, Salisbury Museum’s wonderful archaeology objects, a Bronze Age forge, natural dyed textiles, an Egyptian potter’s wheel, hide tanning, and a chance to make your own gargoyle, there was something for everyone.

It was wonderful to see so many people engaging in so many hands on activities linked to the museum collections, and enjoying learning in interactive ways. We also had an archaeology soapbox area featuring talks by experts on everything from the archaeology of Dorchester to the use of digital imaging in the archaeology of the Middle East and North Africa. Despite heavy drizzle in the afternoon, people continued to enjoy themselves: you know it is PittFest when lovely smells waft from the Taste of Tibet tent and people dance in the rain to Jali Fily Cissokho’s kora music!

Laura Peers, Interim VERVE Project Manager

A very special gift

The Friends have received the very generous gift of £15,000 from Peter Micklethwait, a Life Friend. Peter is a gamelan enthusiast and took a personal interest for several years in the heirloom Indonesian gamelan, Kyai Madu Laras (Venerable Sweet Harmony) belonging to the University Music Department’s Bate Collection of Musical Instruments. It was housed in the PRM’s Balfour Building in Banbury Road until that building was closed. Peter’s gift was made to thank the PRM for ‘hosting’ these instruments. We are very grateful for this most generous donation, and will consider carefully how best to use it.

Gillian Morriss-Kay, Friends’ Chair

Farewell to old Friends

Sam Brooks, 1 July 2015, aged 79; Mary Catherine Fagg, 20 September 2015, aged 99; David Price, 30 April 2016, aged 77; Lisa von Clemm, 25 June 2016, aged 80.

If anyone hears of Friends who have sadly died, please contact the Editor: julesgammon@outlook.com

New Friends

We are delighted to welcome John Page from London as our latest life member. Other new Friends are: Gordon and Barbara Simpson (Wilmcote) and from Oxford, Dr David Lamper and Dr. Heidi Kurtz and Nicky Mullinger.

To learn more about becoming a Friend, or if your details change, please contact Membership Secretary Rosemary King: rhking17@gmail.com or 01367 242433
**Friends of The Pitt Rivers Museum**

**Autumn/Winter 2016**

**INFORMATION SHEET**

The Magazine of the Friends of the Pitt Rivers Museum is produced termly.

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**INFORMATION**

**Friends**

prm.ox.ac.uk/friends

**General Information:** 07415 622072
missingaristau@gmail.com

**Programme:** 01865 390489
g.bremble@gmail.com

**Membership:** 01367 242433
rhking17@gmail.com

**Annual Subscription:** £22 (Joint: £30)
Family: £30; Over 60; £15 (Joint: £22)
Student: (18-25); £10

**Life Membership:** (for 65+); £125
Subscription year from 1 May.
First subscription paid after 1 January valid to 30 April of following year.

**President of Friends of Pitt Rivers:**

Professor Chris Gosden

**Patrons of Friends of Pitt Rivers:**

Alexander Armstrong, Sir David Attenborough, Danby Bloch, Professor Sir Barry Cunliffe, Dame Penelope Lively, Michael Palin CBE, Philip Pullman CBE.

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**Museum**

Pitt Rivers Museum, South Parks Road, Oxford OX1 3PP

01865 270927

Email: www.prm@prm.ox.ac.uk

Open: Tuesday-Sunday 10.00-16.30
Monday 12.00-16.30
Admission FREE.

**Highlights tours**

Wednesdays 14.30 and 15.15
Volunteer-led introduction to the Museum.
Approximately 20 mins. No booking required.

**Saturday Spotlight**

Third Saturday of the month 14.30
A programme of general interest events, FREE.

**After Hours**

Occasional themed evening events.

**Family events:** see www.prm.ox.ac.uk/family-friendly-events-activities-and-workshops

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**Magazine**

Editor: Juliette Gammon

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Design: Alan Hughes

Printed: Oxuniprint

Unit 10, Oxonian Park, Kidlington OX5 1FP

www.oxuniprint.co.uk

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The views expressed are not necessarily those of the Museum. All contributors to the Magazine are Friends unless otherwise stated.

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**MUSEUM DIARY DATES**

**Exhibitions and case displays**

**Long Gallery**

Kabuki – On Stage, Behind the Scenes: photographs by Akio Kushida and Stephanie Berger

Until 16 October 2016

A selection of photographs on the subject of kabuki theatre, the popular Japanese style of drama which developed around 400 years ago and still thrives today.

Followed by:

Embroidered Visions: Photographs of Central Asia and the Middle East by Sheila Paine

1 November 2016 to 30 April 2017

Lower Gallery, case display

Stitch of a Symbol – Insights into the textile journeys of Sheila Paine

Until 12 February 2017

Featuring material assembled by Sheila Paine during her fieldwork in East and Central Asia.

**Exhibitions and case displays**

**Long Gallery**

Archive Case

Chapman’s Northern Lights

Until 6 November 2016

A selection of photographs documenting the British Arctic Air-Route Expedition in 1930-31.

**Events**

Clare Balcony

Photography of Performance

15 October, 14.30-15.30

Documentary photographer Stephanie Berger gives an insight into her work – see Kabuki exhibition in Long Gallery.

Singing at Ark T

21 October, 11.00-12.00

East Oxford-based community choir in full song.

Join us for inclusive singing in the galleries, experienced and novice singers welcome. Book online.

For further information about these displays and other PRM What’s on information (eg Saturday Spotlight and After Hours), see prm.ox.ac.uk/whatsont

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**FRIENDS’ DIARY DATES**

**Redisplaying the Museum’s Cook-Voyage Collection**

A very special evening just for Friends

Wednesday 19 October 18.00

Book by 10 October. Contact: Rosemary Lee
rosemarylee143@btinternet.com
01491 873276

**Deeper than Indigo: Tracing Thomas Machell, forgotten explorer**

Wednesday 16 November 18.00

for 18.30

Jenny Balfour
Paul, Inst. of Arab & Islamic Studies, Exeter University, gives an illustrated account of her adventures in the heartlands of India’s Raj, Polynesia, the South China Seas and Arabia, in search of Thomas Machell, indigo planter and explorer. Tea from 18.00.

Visitors welcome £2. Entrance via Robinson Close, South Parks Rd OX1 3PP

Contact: Terry Bremble
g.bremble@gmail.com 01865 390489

**Christmas Party**

Friday, 2 December 2016, 18.30-21.00

Live music, food, wine, silent auction, quiz and more. Booking required. Tickets £15.

Children free but must be booked in advance.

Enquiries: Terry Bremble:
g.bremble@gmail.com 01865 390489

**Special Event in Lecture Theatre**

Wednesday 25 January 2017 18.30

Friends and guests welcomed.

A special event for Friends to acknowledge their support of the Embroidered Visions exhibition (see col 2)

Contact: Claudette Sherlock
casherlock@gmail.com 07964 752070

**Spring Away Day**

Tuesday 21 February, 2017 11.00 (or 22 February 17.30 if 21st fully subscribed)

A visit to Jeremy Montagu’s collection of musical instruments. Bookings by 8 February

Contact: Felicity Wood
felicitieswood@gmail.com 01865 554281

**Kenneth Kirkwood Memorial Lecture Day**

Saturday, 11 March, 10.00-16.00

SAVE THE DAY

Contact: shahinbekhradnia@hotmail.com

**flyer enclosed**

See prm.ox.ac.uk/friends/ for more information about these Friends’ events