The Hunterian Museum at the Royal College of Surgeons, which
a group of Friends visited in May, is the home of thousands of
specimens that began as the brainchild of the Lanarkshire-born
surgeon John Hunter (1728-1799). At the age of 20, John went
south to assist his anatomist brother William in preparing human
dissections for teaching, but soon set up on his own as well as
undergoing training in surgery. He was fascinated by animal
and human anatomy and wanted to understand the body and its
diseases, as well as to improve the treatment of the gunshot wounds
and venereal disease that he dealt with as an army surgeon. This
motivation, combined with his gifts as a teacher, stimulated his
insatiable appetite for the collection and preparation of a wide variety
of animal, plant and human specimens. By 1783 he had amassed
nearly 14,000, which he displayed in his teaching museum at a large
house in Leicester Square, London.

That same year he acquired the corpse of Charles Byrne (O’Brien),
the 2.31 m (7’7”) Irish giant, reportedly against Byrne’s deathbed
wishes. In her novel *The Giant, O’Brien*, Hilary Mantel gives a
fascinating fictionalised account of Byrne’s life and of Hunter’s
pursuit and acquisition of his remains. Byrne’s growth, which
continued until his death at the early age of 22, is now known to have
been due to a hereditary form of pituitary tumour. This imposing
skeleton is the most arresting element of the display that greets
visitors as they enter the Crystal Gallery of today’s Museum. Another
skeleton stands beside him: ‘Mr Jeffs’, who died at the age of 39 after
a lifetime of suffering from fibrodysplasia ossificans progressiva, a
disease that is characterised by the progressive conversion of tendons
and ligaments into bone.

The walls of the Crystal Gallery are lined by specimen jars
containing preserved animals, including the crocodile embryo
attached to its egg illustrated here. This is one of the many surviving
examples of Hunter’s own preparations, and illustrates his technique
of partial dissection to show interesting features as well as his method
of suspending the specimen by threads to display it in a pose that is
both artistic and informative.

When Hunter died in 1799, the importance of his collection
was recognised by the government, which relocated it to the Royal
College of Surgeons. Since then it has been expertly conserved
and added to as a continuing educational resource for biologists,
anatomists and surgeons. The museum was disastrously bombed
in 1941; two-thirds of the collection was lost, including 10,000
of Hunter’s original specimens. The anatomist and anthropologist
Sir Arthur Keith, who was conservator from 1908 to 1933 and had
greatly expanded the collection, came out of retirement at the age
of 77 to help salvage some of the specimens he had dedicated so
much of his life to collecting and curating. A photograph in one of
the cases shows him standing amidst the rubble of the devastated
museum. The rebuilt structure was refurbished and re-opened in
2005 as the beautiful museum open to visitors today.

Gillian Morriss-Kay, Chair of the Friends

We also visited the fascinating
Sir John Soane’s Museum, Lincoln’s Inn Fields
Editorial

Issue 84 features a centrespread with two offbeat Museum discoveries – Adam Butcher (p6) on sketches by Eduardo Paolozzi and Jeremy Coote (p7) on the hidden depths of a photograph by Charles Dodgson (aka Lewis Caroll). On the page opposite retiring Director Mike O’Hanlon reflects on 17 years at the PRM and our ‘Take a Case’ feature (p9) looks at a new installation, ‘Preserving What is Valued’.

A small number of Friends feature regularly in these pages but I’d like to encourage many more of you to contribute. Next time you visit the Museum give a thought to what you particularly admire and return to again and again, or if you’re a newish Friend perhaps you’d like to write about your latest discovery. If it’s an artefact that would be perfect for a ‘Favourite Thing’ or if a particular case appeals, then it could find a home in the ‘Take A Case’ feature. Alternatively, if you like to explore other countries, and can find a way to reference the PRM, tell us a ‘Traveller’s Tale’. And, don’t forget to encourage children and grandchildren to contribute to the Children’s Column (p11). In all cases please contact me with your ideas juliesgammon@outlook.com

Finally, I’d like to thank Jonathan Bard for his support over the summer, while my right hand has been out of action, and to welcome John Grimley Evans to our editorial team.

Juliette Gammon, Editor

Between Friends

The VERVE project continues apace. The metalwork display is now installed in the Lower Gallery so come and take a look. There are more than 200 objects, including repoussé headwear from Lebanon, bellows from India and China, and brass Neptune dishes from Nigeria. New displays of woodwork and stonework will be complete by the end of the year.

The Need Make Use public programme has impacted on 55,000 people so far and continues to enjoy great success with varied partners, audiences and formats. This summer, the Pop-Up Pitt Rivers tent headed to Salisbury, Wallingford and Witney, movie buffs enjoyed cinema on the lawn; and at the time of writing we’re looking forward to Pitt Fest on Saturday 5 September with its dazzling array of stalls, activities, music and dance.

Helen Adams, VERVE Project Curator/Engagement Officer

### News from the Museum

At the Friends’ Council meeting in July Mike O’Hanlon extended his hearty thanks to the Friends for their support of the Museum during his time as Director. With effect from 1 October 2015, the Museum’s Professor Laura Peers, whom many of us know, will take over as Interim Director, pending the appointment of Mike’s permanent successor. The process of identifying the permanent successor is well in train.

Everyone will be aware from reading the press that there are likely to be leaner times ahead for higher education, including university museums. We will learn more, perhaps, in September’s Comprehensive Spending Review. But, the Pitt Rivers with over 400,000 visitors a year is now the third most visited university museum nationally and is well placed to increase commercial income, on which all museums will increasingly depend. It was good to read in the Daily Telegraph’s ‘Best books for summer 2015’ that Penelope Lively chose Mike’s recent book: The Pitt Rivers Museum: A World Within. She wrote: “He gives an elegant and erudite account of the history of the collections, from the founding donation by the eccentric but ground-breaking General Pitt-Rivers, and then a fascinating exploration and discussion of the contents, from the shrunken heads through musical instruments, weaponry and keys to the glass bottle said to contain a witch. Buy it; go there.”

Felicity Wood, Friend
Decline and fall: a valedictory retrospective

When I was offered the privilege of directing the Pitt Rivers in 1998, a major reason for accepting was my wish to do more teaching and research than my British Museum post allowed. Once here, I found how profoundly I had miscalculated what I now saw were the Pitt Rivers’ needs. The Museum was then scattered in six buildings on five sites. My main task, I thought, was to integrate as much as possible in a new building adjacent to the main galleries. So began my decline and fall, to become what one colleague sadly referred to as a ‘building abbot’, focusing on bricks, mortar and grants, not on teaching and research.

First, the Museum needed re-roofing. Conventionally, it would be unthinkable to take its roof off, without first removing everything inside. Oxford, though, is not conventional, and lacking both storage space and staff to decant the hundred-thousand artefacts, we bubble-wrapped everything and erected a temporary plastic roof. Eventually, a splendid new permanent roof was completed, and my heart rate returned to more normal levels.

Major fund-raising efforts for a new building followed. Here I learned the great advantages of an early failure, and how to play the underdog. The most obvious funding source was the Heritage Lottery, but they indicated they wanted only one major bid from Oxford at a time. Wisely, the University decided the Ashmolean’s stunning redevelopment should be the bid to go forward.

This failure did however earn us University sympathy, and time to prepare a better bid to the Science Research Investment Fund who awarded us half the £8 million we needed. But their offer came with strings: the funding had to be spent within two years and only on research and infrastructure, not on the collections, conservation and display facilities we also wanted.

Happily, the University credited us with the value of our old sites, and this, alongside the Pitt Rivers’ new VAT relief, provided the full £8 million needed for the new building – a mere century after the Museum’s first Curator had proposed it! Subsequently, successful applications to the Heritage Lottery Fund allowed us to restore the Museum’s entrance and to launch VERVE, the project outstandingly led by Helen Adams.

I have focused on buildings matters, as these have been the constant thread of both my time and that of the Museum’s indispensable administrative staff. Meanwhile, energetic colleagues secured funding for a cascade of curatorial research projects. These have deepened connections with the communities from which collections come, and brought world figures, such as the Dalai Lama, to the Museum.

A great success has also been the digitisation, and making available of our collection over the web, led by my academic colleagues and by IT Head, Haas Ezzet. Together, these developments have helped treble visitor numbers in my time: this year sees a new record of over 416,000. Crucial here is the commitment of our wonderful Front of House and Education staff, no less so than that of our resourceful Conservation and Technical teams. The dedication of the whole staff has earned us awards ranging from the Guardian’s prize as the UK’s most ‘family friendly’ museum and the Clore prize for museum learning, to the Ames prize for the most innovative anthropological project, while The Times newspaper places us as the world’s 11th best museum.

At the close of my tenure, I remain acutely aware of unresolved issues, including insecure funding and the need to move the research collections from their Osney home. Nevertheless, I remain upbeat about the future, not least because of the support I know the new Director will enjoy, as I have, from such a wonderful Friends’ organisation.

Michael O’Hanlon, Museum Director

This is an abridged version of the hour-long talk Michael O’Hanlon gave to the Friends in June 2015
Bayeux embroidery at BAfM conference

BAfM (British Association of Friends of Museums) is an independent organisation that represents more than 200,000 museum Friends and supporters across the UK. I attended this year’s south east western counties area conference, which was hosted by the Friends of the Reading Museum.

In the morning, we had presentations from the manager of the Reading Museum and a local historian on the Reading Abbey. In the afternoon, we could choose from a variety of workshops and presentations. I went on tours of the Bayeux Tapestry and the ‘Box Room’ which houses the learning boxes that the museum loans out to schools to facilitate learning.

The Bayeux Tapestry at the Reading Museum is a Victorian copy of the original, which dates from the 11th century and depicts images from the Battle of Hastings. Although known as the Bayeux Tapestry it is not a tapestry but an embroidery. This full-size copy, which is over 70m long and displayed in a purpose-built gallery, is not only fascinating to look at, but very informative about Anglo-Saxon life in the 11th century.

I also had a chance to see the Box Room where the boxes of handling artefacts are kept. The Reading Museum has a long history of providing objects for schools and today has over 1,500 boxes of handling objects. The room we were shown was packed floor to ceiling with metal boxes containing a variety of objects organised in themes that ranged from natural history to Ancient Egypt.

I had a wonderful day with plenty of time to exchange ideas with people from other Friends groups in the area, and will look forward to meeting them at the next BAfM conference.

Terri Costain, Friend

Copy of The Crossing Scene, Bayeux Tapestry, Reading Museum

Last chance to see...

‘Architecture for All: the photography of Paul Oliver’

Friends still have until 11 October to see this fascinating photographic exhibition of buildings and architecture from all over the world.

The exhibition takes an unusual cross-cultural perspective of its subject. Professor Paul Oliver pioneered vernacular architecture studies, a building style that responds directly to the culture and needs of the society in which it exists and does not necessarily include the contribution of architects. The display is a record of decades of photographing the structures of everyday life, not architectural showpieces.

The photographs show buildings, materials, decorations and architectural details from cultures around the globe. In documenting the monumental as well as the ordinary, the traditional as well as the modern, they recognise the value of all buildings, not just those of specific cultures or those made by architects, as cultural expressions worthy of admiration. Taken from the early 1960s up to 2008, they show the different ways in which societies express their needs, beliefs, and aspirations in architectural form. Images of suburban homes and city high-rises are displayed alongside tribal mud dwellings and temples, together with close-ups of building details and decorations. The people who inhabit and use the buildings often feature in the pictures, emphasising the very human character of this view of architecture.

The exhibition was curated by Dr Marcel Vellinga, of the School of Architecture at Oxford Brookes University and the images were selected from a collection of 22,500 held in the Paul Oliver Vernacular Architecture Image Library at the university. An accompanying booklet and postcards are for sale in the Pitt Rivers Museum shop.

Dorothy Walker, Friend

Street scene, Paros, Cyclades, Greece, probably 1966

Copy of The Crossing Scene, Bayeux Tapestry, Reading Museum
Travellers’ tales: racing round the world

Most people go to Dubai for the shopping, I went for the horseracing. And, not just any race but the 20th anniversary of the $10 million Dubai World Cup, backed up by another nine championship events with prizes ranging from a ‘modest’ $1 million to $6 million. The horses come from all corners of the earth – and so do the racegoers – over 80,000 of them. Racing cuts across cultures and winners hailed from the US, UK, France, South Africa and the Emirates.

Dubai, and racing, is governed by the Al Maktoum family and peopled by Arabs, ex-pats and the Sudanese, Pakistani and Turkish workforce here to erect the massive, futuristic constructions of the city. Even if you aren’t lucky enough to secure one of the 3,000 free tickets, a reasonable AED25 (£4.60) buys entry to the public stand which democratically abuts the royal enclosure, the paddock and the winning post. There’s no betting in Dubai but the foreign workers and local Arabs sit in circles avidly studying form for the AED150,000 ‘competition’ to select six consecutive winners.

Arabs and Turks love horses. After all, they founded modern thoroughbred racing when three celebrated stallions – The Darley Arabian, the Godolphin Arabian and the Byerley Turk – were imported to England in the late 17th and early 18th centuries and crossbred with local mares. None is keener than Sheikh Mohammed, Prime Minister of the UAE and Emir of Dubai. The largest horse breeder in the world with stud farms in the US, UK, Ireland and Australia, he and his family have ensured the international growth of the sport since buying the first million-dollar yearling at Keeneland, Kentucky, in 1987.

By the parade ring a young man in a fine kandura tells me that even the richest sheikhs never wear silk: “Men should be hard and strong; silk is soft and for the lady.” We’re interrupted by loud cheering as an exuberant Michael Owen, (footballer turned owner-breeder) wins the Dubai Gold Cup and the white-robed Police Silver Band march down the racecourse playing the UAE national anthem.

Unusually, the further you venture from the winning post the more affluent the racegoer. First come rows of restaurants, boxes and 72 private suites packed with uber-rich corporate Dubai. Further still, in fact half a mile from the finish, you come to the two legal, public drinking areas – the Moet and Chandon lawn and the Irish Village – with partygoers in Royal Ascot meets costume ball attire. For both sexes the accessory of choice is an ice-packed, champagne-shaped, plastic bag and there’s not a horse in sight.

Here the expats are a thoroughly international mix. A glamorous trio – Brazilian Vivian Saffier, Belarusan Tatiana Vainilovich and their jovial escort Mohamed Al Suwaidi from Abu Dhabi – share their champagne. Nearby, a splendidly-attired Baghdadi in knee-high blue suede boots, spangled waistcoat and red top hat poses with the madcap UK/US ‘Barba Shop 3’ in striped jackets and boaters.

The lack of betting, and alcohol, make the day (and night) somewhat surreal for this Western visitor. Without odds and bookies you have little idea of the fancied horses and I didn’t discover until much later that Prince Bishop, winner of the world’s richest race paid a generous 15-1. Internet betting websites are blocked though this doesn’t daunt some surreptitious ex-pats with an overseas bookmaker at the end of their smartphone.

On the plane home an English couple comment on “the lack of betting buzz” at the course. However, Crown Prince Sheikh Hamdan’s victory in the concluding World Cup was greeted by loud applause which increased to a mad hysteria at 10pm as Kylie Minogue stepped onto the stage above the champagne imbibers. At this point in the festivities, I gave up and went home...

Juliette Gammon, Editor
Paolozzi at the Pitt Rivers

An art student found his way into the Pitt Rivers in February 1945. There was nothing very remarkable about that even such a time ago, except that the visitor, then about 20, was to become one of the most influential figures in twentieth-century British art. His prolific legacy includes irrepressible pop art collages, and London landmarks such as the statue of Newton at the British Library and the exuberant ceramic murals of Tottenham Court Road station.

Eduardo Paolozzi was born in 1924, the son of Italian immigrants to Scotland, who made and sold ice cream in Leith – surely not an easy living. During World War II Eduardo persuaded the British Army that he would be more trouble than he was worth in the armed forces, and was in Oxford as an art student in 1945. The Pitt Rivers on a winter’s day in wartime was presumably dark and cheerless – but at least it was open (these were the days before someone hit on the idea of letting visitors in every day). The sketches inscribed ‘Pitt Rivers’ and dated ‘February 1945’ show the striking forms of African sculpture he would have found. But it’s proved unexpectedly difficult to identify any of the drawings with specific items in the Museum.

However, amongst some 280 masks in the Pitt Rivers, one from Ivory Coast seems to correspond with the item on the right of the middle row of the artwork. The mask suggested above as a matching item turns out, strangely, to be the cast of an original the US. Moreover, it wasn’t acquired by the Museum until the late 1960s so it’s simply not possible that Paolozzi drew it in Oxford in 1945. It’s much more likely that he had encountered another very similar mask in Edinburgh. The uniform patina and high gloss of this piece are nearer to the effect in his drawing; and there’s another relatively close match in the same collection.

Although the artist’s rendering of the bird ornament is different, the museum in his home city is a plausible source, unlike the Pitt Rivers, which has nothing at all like it.

So we can’t claim that the 1945 drawings constitute a record of any display in Oxford. In fact the individual sketched items are likely to have been collated from various sources at different times. But we can assume that the Museum here helped to stimulate Paolozzi’s interest in artefacts from other cultures, and to inspire his delight in unexpected and surreal juxtapositions. This culminated in the unique collaboration with the British Museum’s Ethnology Department in the 1985 exhibition Lost Magic Kingdoms. In a sense he acknowledged this debt and the ‘solace’ he took in drawing at the Pitt Rivers in a gift to the Museum (half a century after his first visit) of a print of one of his later artworks. So do any of the drawings he refers to nostalgically still survive? We can’t identify any with certainty – but is there a chance that the outline at the top left of the sketch was derived, a little freely, from the mask you can see in the centre of the new Nigerian masks case?

Adam Butcher, Friend
‘Dressed as a New Zealander’: a photograph by Charles Dodgson

On 7 May 2009, Oxford Times journalist Chris Koenig wrote that “the door leading from the University Museum to the Pitt Rivers Museum, was the inspiration for John Tenniel’s drawing of a door in Through the Looking Glass, surmounted by the words ‘Queen Alice’”. In a letter the following week, I pointed out that Through the Looking Glass was published in 1871, some 14 years before the Pitt Rivers collection came to Oxford and our door was constructed. Indeed, all the creative writing of Charles Dodgson (aka Lewis Carroll) was completed well before the General’s collection arrived.

There is, however, one less-direct but nevertheless intriguing link between the author and the Pitt Rivers. In September 2012, with the support of the Chadwyck-Healey Fund and the V&A Purchase Grant Fund, the Museum purchased a photograph taken by Charles Dodgson in July 1866 – a year after Alice in Wonderland was published – of an eight-year-old girl, named Ella Monier-Williams, entitled ‘Dressed as a New Zealander’.

It was already suspected that some of the ‘props’ used by Dodgson were now in the Museum’s collections, and so it has proved. In 1866 Dodgson ‘borrowed some articles from the Ashmolean’, arranged for Ella to be dressed in them, and photographed her. These ‘props’ have now all been identified in the collection of ‘ethnographic’ objects transferred from the Ashmolean to the newly-arrived Pitt Rivers Collection in 1886 – and are still here. Ella sits on a Tongan mat from the Forsters’ ‘Cook-Voyage’ collection (1886.1.1177) laid out on the floor in the corner of Dodgson’s studio. She is wrapped in a Maori cloak (1886.1.1127), and wears around her head a sash from the Great Lakes region of North America (1886.1.965). On her left ankle she wears a Hawaiian boar-tusk armlet (1886.1.1564) and in her left hand she holds a Maori paddle (1886.1.1156), and propped up against the wall is a Mozambican bow (1886.1.516.1).

The image raises two particular questions. How could Dodgson borrow these objects from the Ashmolean to use in his studio at Badcock’s Yard in St Aldate’s? And what inspired him to photograph Ella Monier-Williams in this way? First, we need to remember that ideas about proper museum practice have changed enormously since then. There is good photographic evidence that as recently as 1950 staff and students of the Faculty of Archaeology and Anthropology in Cambridge dressed up in objects from the University’s collection for a party held to mark the retirement of John Hutton, the curator of the PRM’s sister museum. If this was possible in Cambridge 65 years ago, it is not surprising that 150 years ago Dodgson could walk to the Ashmolean in Broad Street (now the Museum of the History of Science) and select a few props for his next photographic session.

As for how he portrays Ella Monier-Williams, it does appear that – despite using props from all over the world – Dodgson deliberately intended to produce images of a girl ‘Dressed as a New Zealander’. Christ Church then had close connections with the settlement of Christchurch in New Zealand and Dodgson may have been inspired by images of Maori women he had seen and, perhaps, by Ella’s ‘Polynesian-ish’ hair. Chris Morton and I have published our research into the photograph and we expect the image will create considerable interest – especially, perhaps, in New Zealand. There is no doubt more to discover.

Jeremy Coote,
Curator and Joint Head of Collections


Above: Print of a photograph by Charles Lutwidge Dodgson of Ella Monier-Williams 2012.107.1; Bottom right: Knife with six shark’s teeth bound to one edge with fibre. Carved with inlaid mother-of-pearl circular discs, Polynesia, New Zealand 1886.1.1161

Both images: © Pitt Rivers Museum
Handle with care

Saturday object handling is a new activity for our general education programme. It involves a team of volunteers, working in pairs, who share some of our handling objects with the general public. Many of our education activities focus on engaging visitors, especially children, with the Pitt Rivers’ collections, and lots of these activities have a handling table where visitors can explore some of these objects. I wanted to create an activity where the focus was on bringing the Museum to life by allowing people to touch real things and get a sense of how they feel, how they smell, and perhaps what they sound like.

We have many wonderful and fascinating exhibits in the PRM, and the education team has selected a great range of objects that we encourage visitors to touch. Being able to touch real things can make an impact on someone’s experience of the Museum; it’s more tactile and informative than just looking. These objects bring stories of people to life and allow us to understand who they were, why they did certain things, and how we may be similar to them.

I recruited a dozen enthusiastic volunteers to deliver these regular Saturday morning sessions. Their training involved thinking about how we might talk about an object to visitors of different ages and abilities, considering how a young child might interact with it, and thinking about visitors with English as a second language. We also explored sensitive issues connected to these items and how we might talk about them with visitors, making sure we encourage cultural understanding. Volunteers gained a lot of skills and knowledge from this training to use during the object-handling sessions, as Sian’s piece below shows.

We hope to build up the team over time and to add new objects to the table. Please bring your friends and family to explore some of the Pitt Rivers collection and meet the team of enthusiastic volunteers.

Carly Smith-Huggins, Family Education Officer

A volunteer’s view

I was drawn to the object handling sessions as I love the variety of the Pitt Rivers’ collection and am passionate about inspiring and interacting with visitors of all ages. The sessions are extremely popular, with over 100 people interacting with the objects over a two-hour period. From my experience of delivering the sessions, it is a hugely valuable and accessible activity for every museum visitor. It is a great way to witness how adaptable museums are and also how people approach museum objects in completely different ways. You can give the same object to a variety of people from a young child to a frequent museumgoer and get different conversations and questions asked each time.

I really enjoy conversations with visitors who can share stories about their connection to the objects or to the wider theme of magic and superstition, which is what links all objects used in these sessions. While talking about superstition and beliefs, one particular family told us that there is a man from their village who is the seventh son of a seventh son. People come from miles around to visit him to cure common ailments such as asthma. It is this process of being able to recognise the beliefs and thought processes behind the objects and then being able to relate to them which is really interesting and what amazes lots of visitors. Something that may originally appear to be an unusual-looking object with an unidentifiable use can also turn out to be extremely thought provoking.

Sian Burgess, Object Handling Volunteer

Object handling sessions, Saturdays 10.30am to 12.30pm

All photos: Carly Smith-Huggins
Take a case: ‘Preserving What is Valued’

If you have been a Friend of the Pitt Rivers for a while, you will remember the days when it was a rare treat to have a new display to enjoy on your visit. Now it seems that new displays in the Museum are like London buses – you wait a while and then at least three come along at once!

VERVE and other projects are resulting in many new permanent displays and there are still temporary exhibitions taking place around the PRM while the temporary exhibition gallery is out of action. Some of these exhibitions tie into the VERVE themes of Need, Make, Use, such as the current case exhibition ‘Preserving What is Valued – A World of Repairs’ on the Museum’s lower gallery.

The conservation department were keen to curate a temporary exhibition showing original repairs found on objects in the PRM collections from all areas of the world. Given the nature of our work we study objects in detail and part of our role is often to determine at what stage a repair has been made. Has it been done while the object was still in use in its originating community, or by the original collector, or in the Museum context? When we find examples of repairs from originating communities, we feel it gives the object a deeper resonance and is something we strive to preserve. Why was this object repaired by its original owners rather than replaced? Is it a fine example of craftsmanship or is it a sacred object? Were the materials it is made from scarce? These are just some of the questions we have attempted to explore in the exhibition.

The inspiration for ‘Preserving What is Valued’ was ‘Gold: All that Glisters – Japanese Gold Decoration’, an exhibition held at the Japanese embassy in London in summer 2014. Part of the exhibition was dedicated to kintsugi – the repair of damaged or broken ceramics using urushi lacquer and, most commonly, powdered gold. From early times, imperfection has been the subject of aesthetic appreciation in Japan, particularly with regard to the repair of valued items that have suffered in the course of daily use. The exhibition celebrates imperfection by bringing together repaired objects from the reserve collections that are not normally on display in the Museum.

One of the stars of the show was a late addition when it was discovered during a packing project at one of the off-site stores. The gourd was collected in either Kenya or Tanzania around 1960 by Phoebe Somers and was donated in 1996. Sadly, little is known about the object, but perhaps this allows more room for interpretation, or should that be speculation, as to why the repair was made. A long split emanating from the neck has been repaired with metal staples. The gourd is otherwise completely undecorated suggesting that it was not given as a wedding gift, examples of which would generally have designs engraved on the surface. The gourd is also very clean on the inside, with no signs of liquid or food deposits as is often the case. We also do not know how it was done so neatly and without causing additional damage. This demonstrates how the exhibition provides us with an opportunity to look beyond the form of the objects and to see how a focus on repairs allows new stories to emerge.

The exhibition runs until 3 January 2016 and also includes a gallery trail to guide visitors to some of the repaired objects on permanent display. There will also be a kintsugi project from 5-14 November, including demonstrations and practical workshops given by lacquer-ware artisans from Kyoto.

Heather Richardson
Head of Conservation

Clockwise from left: Gourd with long, vertical crack repaired with metal staples 1996.21.2; Porcelain wine cup, Sichuan, China, decorated with figures and Chinese script: repaired with lead solder and copper alloy staples 1991.30.14; Netted bag, Western Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea darned with string made of grey marsupial hair. 2001.27.3; Three arm ornaments from Africa with different methods of original repair 1903.16.75.2, 1939.3.181, 1930.43.68
The last Mughal emperor was Bahadur Shah II, a benign ruler and a fine poet. He lived however at a time when the East India Company had started to take an evangelical Christian stance which led to bad feelings between them and both the Hindus and Muslims, particularly in the army. The situation came to a boil with the introduction of the new Enfield rifle which required the sepoys to bite a cartridge which they thought was lubricated with a mixture of bull and pig fat, so insulting both communities. The resulting mutinies led to dreadful massacres on both sides with the British blaming the Mughal ruler. In 1857, they exiled him to Burma and shot his sons, so ending a great dynasty. William’s narration was a marvel of storytelling, mixing charm and erudition, while Vidya’s singing, accompanied by ipad-delivered music, was both haunting and beautiful. At the end, Barbara Topley, the organiser, thanked William and Vidya and, when the cheers died away, everyone went down to the PRM for wine and large amounts of superb nibbles. As we talked about the wonderful performance, William signed copies of his book for Friends who had bought it. This year’s BB evening is going to be a very hard act to follow.

Jonathan Bard, Friend and Emeritus Professor, University of Edinburgh

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The Beatrice Blackwood (BB) evening is always a special event in the FPRM calendar, but it is unlikely that there has ever been one as successful as this year’s. The lecture theatre of the Oxford University Museum of Natural History was filled with 300 people to hear the well-known historian, William Dalrymple, talk about his book The Last Mughal. His story was interspersed with songs of the period sung by the outstanding North-Indian singer, Vidya Shah, brought here through the generosity of Sulwain Talwar, a Mumbai lawyer.

The Japanese Edo Oni figures highlight the problems associated with constructional instability, decay and unexpected difficulties caused by previous interventions. How to deal with objects which were never intended to last very long is covered in the study of the three Jagannath figures. Similar issues needed to be resolved in the conservation of the Tahitian Mourners’ costume, the Lakota war bonnet and the Noh theatre masks. The conservation of the Arctic intestine waterproofs raised several problems. Unfortunately, past treatments and repairs, insect damage, poor storage and display techniques had caused the garments to become fragile and vulnerable and there is a need to distinguish between ‘ethnic’ and ‘museum’ repairs. This also applies to the Maori cloaks which have been stabilised by housing in individual purpose-built boxes with ‘Tyvek’ linings while a long-term answer to the breakdown of the black-dyed fabric is sought.

Preparation of Blackfoot shirts for an exhibition in Alberta involved the usual interventions and a consultation with a Blackfoot ceremonial leader. The shirts, since they include human hair, are considered sacred so, for their own protection, the conservators were blessed and painted with red ochre.

The Ainu hunting quiver presented a totally different puzzle, the mystery of the two layers of soot. Read the book to find out more.

David Nutt, Friend

Book review

With Greatest Care

If like me you are curious to find out what goes on behind the scenes you will enjoy this splendidly illustrated little book. Conservation is one of those activities which keep collections up to scratch and here the conservators of the PRM have brought together nine case studies to illustrate many aspects of their work and the sort of decisions they have to make.

The book is best summed up by a quotation from its introduction. “Some case studies detail complex and lengthy treatments, while others introduce the idea of a passive approach to caring for objects, which may include conserving the intangible stories they hold.”

The Japanese Edo Oni figures highlight the problems associated with constructional instability, decay and unexpected difficulties caused by previous interventions. How to deal with objects which were never intended to last very long is covered in the study of the three Jagannath figures. Similar issues needed to be resolved in the conservation of the Tahitian Mourners’ costume, the Lakota war bonnet and the Noh theatre masks.

The conservation of the Arctic intestine waterproofs raised several problems. Unfortunately, past treatments and repairs, insect damage, poor storage and display techniques had caused the garments to become fragile and vulnerable and there is a need to distinguish between ‘ethnic’ and ‘museum’ repairs. This also applies to the Maori cloaks which have been stabilised by housing in individual purpose-built boxes with ‘Tyvek’ linings while a long-term answer to the breakdown of the black-dyed fabric is sought.

Preparation of Blackfoot shirts for an exhibition in Alberta involved the usual interventions and a consultation with a Blackfoot ceremonial leader. The shirts, since they include human hair, are considered sacred so, for their own protection, the conservators were blessed and painted with red ochre.

The Ainu hunting quiver presented a totally different puzzle, the mystery of the two layers of soot. Read the book to find out more.

David Nutt, Friend

With Greatest Care is on sale in the PRM Shop for £4.50 with Friends’ discount.
Children’s choice: a shark-toothed trident

When I visit the Pitt Rivers with my family, I always head straight for the top floor where you can find all the weapons and armour. I like how creative people have been when they make the armour.

Often weapons are made from metal but what if people don’t have metal where they live? They have to look around and see what materials they have which they could use to make them.

My favourite object is a three-pronged weapon edged with shark’s teeth – it is called a taumangaria and comes from the Gilbert Islands. I think it might be used for fighting. I think it’s really clever the way they have lined the sticks with teeth. I wonder how they have fixed those teeth on. Banged in with a stone? I wonder what it would feel like to touch those teeth – sharp I bet.

I also like looking at the other objects nearby which have been made from bits of animal. I like the porcupine fish helmet and the armour made from crocodile skin. But this trident weapon stands out the most. I would like to hold it but maybe not try it out in a duel with other warriors. I think it could do a lot of damage. I certainly wouldn’t want my little brother to get his hands on it in a fight against me.

Sam Heide, age 9

A gap to be filled

In the last issue, I discussed Case 106A (the History of Writing), which currently includes wonderful examples of cuneiform, hieroglyphic and Chinese logograms, Indus seals, and early Punic abjad text (a consonant-only alphabet). These represent all the major examples of original writing modes, except Mayan. The PRM does however have an example of a Mayan glyph (character) of a head painted on pottery from Lubaantun, Maya, but it is hidden away in the PRM store. Displaying it in Case 106A would complete the Museum’s record of the history of writing, and there is space for it.

Jonathan Bard,
Friend and Emeritus Professor, University of Edinburgh

Welcome to new Friends

I’m delighted to announce three new Life members: Mary Pritchard (Richmond, Surrey), who is a new Friend, and Andrew Casebow (Guernsey) and Clemence Schultz (Durham), who were already members. A warm welcome to them and to our other new Friends: Judith Argles, Katherine Bradley, Corinne Grimley Evans, and Nicholas and Rumi (Durham), who were already members. A warm welcome to them and to our other new Friends: Judith Argles, Katherine Bradley, Corinne Grimley Evans, and Nicholas and Rumi (Durham), who were already members. A warm welcome to them and to our other new Friends: Judith Argles, Katherine Bradley, Corinne Grimley Evans, and Nicholas and Rumi (Durham), who were already members. A warm welcome to them and to our other new Friends: Judith Argles, Katherine Bradley, Corinne Grimley Evans, and Nicholas and Rumi (Durham), who were already members. A warm welcome to them and to our other new Friends: Judith Argles, Katherine Bradley, Corinne Grimley Evans, and Nicholas and Rumi (Durham), who were already members. A warm welcome to them and to our other new Friends: Judith Argles, Katherine Bradley, Corinne Grimley Evans, and Nicholas and Rumi (Durham), who were already members. A warm welcome to them and to our other new Friends: Judith Argles, Katherine Bradley, Corinne Grimley Evans, and Nicholas and Rumi (Durham), who were already members. A warm welcome to them and to our other new Friends: Judith Argles, Katherine Bradley, Corinne Grimley Evans, and Nicholas and Rumi (Durham), who were already members. A warm welcome to them and to our other new Friends: Judith Argles, Katherine Bradley, Corinne Grimley Evans, and Nicholas and Rumi (Durham), who were already members. A warm welcome to them and to our other new Friends: Judith Argles, Katherine Bradley, Corinne Grimley Evans, and Nicholas and Rumi (Durham), who were already members. A warm welcome to them and to our other new Friends: Judith Argles, Katherine Bradley, Corinne Grimley Evans, and Nicholas and Rumi (Durham), who were already members.

Welcome to new Friends: Judith Argles, Katherine Bradley, Corinne Grimley Evans, and Nicholas and Rumi
(see p8) and Family Friendly Fun every Sunday 14.00-16.00

Farewell to old Friends

Anne Brereton, 2 May 2015, aged 88; Barbara Isaac, 13 July 2015, aged 77, a member of the Friends’ Council for many years; Phyllis Nye, 18 February 2015 aged 93; Derek Roe, 24 September 2014, aged 83, Founder of the Baden-Powell Quaternary Research Centre for Palaeolithic Archaeology, now part of the Institute of Archaeology in Beaumont Street.

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

Do you shop online?

Many retailers will donate a percentage of your purchase to the PRM Friends when you shop with them, via: easyfundraising.org.uk

Already registered? Spread the word to family and friends about how easy it is!
INFORMATION

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prm.ox.ac.uk/friends

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

Museum
Pitt Rivers Museum, South Parks Road,
Oxford OX1 3PP
prm.ox.ac.uk
01865 270927
Email: prm@prm.ox.ac.uk
Open: Tuesday-Sunday 10.00-16.30

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

After Hours
Occasional themed evening events

Family events: see page 11

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Design: Alan Hughes

Printed: Oxuniprint
Unit 10, Oxonian Park, Kidlington OX5 1FP
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The views expressed are not necessarily those of the Museum. All contributors to the Magazine are Friends unless otherwise stated

MUSEUM DIARY DATES

Exhibitions and case displays
Long Gallery: Architecture For All
The Photography of Paul Oliver
Until 11 October 2015

Case 17, Lower Gallery
Preserving What is Valued
Until 3 January 2016
The Conservation Department curates a temporary exhibition showcasing original repairs found on objects in the PRM collections from all areas of the world

Case 22 in the Court
My Siberian Year, 1914-1915
Until 28 February 2016

Case 17, Lower Gallery
Kintsugi
5–14 November
Traditional lacquerware artists Muneaki Shimode and Takahiko Sato will be resident at the Museum demonstrating kintsugi techniques of repairing ceramics with lacquer and gold powder

Japanese Fired Works Night
Wednesday 13 January, 18.00–20.00

Half-day Kintsugi Workshops 7, 11, and 14 November.
£60*

Kintsugi Gallery Demonstration
6, 8, 10 and 13 November
Free

Light Night
Friday 20 November (ticketed)
The now legendary Winter Light Night.
Venture into the Museum, torch in hand, and explore the darkened cases after hours

*Book online

For further information about the displays listed above and also for other PRM What’s On information eg Saturday Spotlight (third Saturday of the Month,14.30, Free). After Hours Tours (twice monthly 17.30-19.00, £10*) and other events see: prm.ox.ac.uk/whatson

FRIENDS’ DIARY DATES

Friends’ Lecture
A Celebration Evening for Friends
Wednesday 21 October 18.00
Redisplaying the Museum’s Cook-voyage Collection*
Short presentations by Alan Cooke, Jeremy Coote, Jeremy Uden and Chris Wilkinson.
Bookings by 9 October.
Enquiries: prm.ox.ac.uk/friendsevents.html
or Rosemary Lee 01491 873276 rosemarylee143@btinternet.com

Autumn Away Day
Monday 2 November
A visit to the Bodleian’s Weston Library
Already fully booked

Friends’ Lecture
Wednesday 18 November, 18.00 for 18.30
Kuwait National Museum and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait: a conservator’s view from the ground
Kirsty Norman Honorary Lecturer, Institute of Archaeology, University College, London.
Pitt Rivers Lecture Room, access via Robinson Close, South Parks Road, OX1 3PP. Visitors most welcome. £2 contribution appreciated. No parking available. Tea from 18.00. Enquiries to Terry Bremble: g.bremble@gmail.com 01865 390489

Christmas Party
Friday 4 December, 18.30–21.00
Live Music, Wine and Soft Drinks
Memorable Morsels, Silent Auction, Late Night Shopping, Photo Quiz
See flyer enclosed. Booking required. Tickets £15. Children free but must be booked in advance. Enquiries to Terry Bremble g.bremble@gmail.com 01865 390489

Behind the Scenes
Wednesday 13 January, 2016 11.00
or 14.00 Visit to PRM’s Photograph Collections* Bookings by 14 December.
Enquiries to Martin Rush martinrush48@gmail.com 01865 725842

Spring Away Day
Saturday 9 February, 2016
Just next door... an architectural walkabout
University Museum, Biochemistry’s new building and more. See flyer enclosed. Booking required. Tickets £15. Children free but must be booked in advance. Enquiries to Terry Bremble g.bremble@gmail.com 01865 390489

Kenneth Kirkwood Memorial Lecture Day
Saturday 12 March, 2016 10.00–16.00
SAVE THE DAY Theme tbc
Enquiries: shahinbekhradnia@hotmail.com
See prm.ox.ac.uk/friendsevents for more information about these Friends’ events

*An event just for Friends

INFORMATION SHEET
Autumn/Winter 2015
The Magazine of the Friends of the Pitt Rivers Museum is produced termly