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The Friends of the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford Magazine

Pitt Rivers Museum

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IN THIS ISSUE

Cover image: Evenki artist Galina Veretnova and Pitt Rivers Museum staff performing an Evenki reconciliation ceremony in the Museum. © Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford

Between Friends

Photo © Anthony Flemming

"*Money has no essence. It's not 'really' anything, therefore, its nature has always been, and presumably always will be, a matter of political contention*" suggested the late anthropologist, David Graeber. Following the recent interplay of politics and economics in the UK, he does seem to have a point. For sure money has an abstract quality: its value is a judgement on the future potential of the bearer's locale to have something to buy, produce that may not yet exist. Should this potential fail, money becomes useless – you cannot eat it or shelter under it.

Yuval Noah Harari in his bestseller '*Sapiens*' argues that the ability for abstract thought was a key step in the cognitive development of humans, citing examples such as a Limited Liability Company whose minimum existence is simply a legal entity which is there just so long as we collectively agree it to be so. Similarly, in the post Bretton Woods era the gold-standard has been abandoned, the international monetary system is not pegged to anything tangible. Currency values float (or sink) on collective opinion, not to mention the whims of prime ministers and their chancellors.

Photo of PRM display : © Anthony Flemming

STONE MONEY OF UAP, WESTERN CAROLINE ISLANDS.

Photo: Dr William Henry Furness III (1866-1920)

But for all this there is a material side to the coin (excuse the pun) too: whether as means of exchange, method of payment or standard of value, money is usually a thing you can hold in your hand, and there is a fascinating diversity of such things in the PRM. Take the Papua New Guinean shell money collected in the early 20th century (not on current display) whose use saw a resurgence during the pandemic when financial transactions became highly localised. Or the huge stone discs used as money on Yap (Uap) Island, Micronesia (illustrated): this currency fascinated economists in being accounted for via a kind of public ledger, in which the whole community agrees and remembers the ownership and transaction history of individual stones - a system reminiscent of the blockchain underpinning cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin.

Anthony Flemming, *Member of the PRM Liaison Committee and Friend*

Editorial

Photo © Dawn Osborne

As I look over this issue I am struck by the sense of progress in attitudes of equality and inclusivity which are changing for the good in our modern world. I am happy to say that the article we have on the first female anthropologists in Oxford shows the Museum was at the forefront of affording opportunities to women, as it is at the forefront now in taking steps to ensure that all peoples of the world are properly respected and communed with as equals (see the details of the consultations re ancestral remains and the Evenki reconciliation ceremony discussed by our Director on page three and featured on our cover.)

Death has possibly loomed even larger in the public consciousness in the last few years due to the Pandemic, wars around the world, and the death of the Queen. We have some poignant articles re an artist's work with the possessions of the departed, the story of a rickshaw - the prized possession of a Friend - left to the Museum for future generations to enjoy, and an interesting article on Indonesian practices concerning ancestors.

Thanks to everybody involved in the Magazine content and production this issue. We are always happy to receive constructive feedback on the Magazine and suggestions for topics for articles.

Dawn Osborne, *Editor*

Museum News

From the Director

Now that Covid, if not the many other autumnal viruses, are on the decline, PRM staff are switching from years of meeting online to getting together in person with international partners. The last few months have been fascinating and busy.

In August and September, I travelled to Ecuador to renew our engagement with the Shuar federation and our colleagues of the Universidad de San Francisco in Quito, Ecuador. With Dr Maria Patricia Ordoñez and my collaborative doctoral student Rosa Dyer, we travelled many miles across Amazonia and discussed the future of the Shuar tsantsa (shrunken heads) in the Museum's collections. In July, Leiden University intern Sterre Houtzager and assistant curator Nicholas Crowe had undertaken a mapping of EU, UK and USA tsantsa collections and have so far identified 172 tsantsas, two thirds of which are in the UK, with none being on display. To discover whether the PRM tsantsa are of commercial or ceremonial nature, we need to analyse their DNA and scan them. As Maria is a renowned specialist on DNA analysis of mummified remains of South America, our conservation team have taken samples of the PRM tsantsa for her to analyse, while three of the PRM tsantsa are now being CT-scanned by our colleagues at Cranfield University.

At the end of September, we opened Marina Abramovic's wonderful display at the PRM. During her month-long residence last Summer, Marina worked alongside PRM curator Professor Clare Harris installing her video work, '*The Witch Ladder'*, that now powerfully occupies one of the Court cases (Fig. 1). Marina engages with conceptualisations of Presences and Absences of thirteen objects she chose, or rather that chose her. Standing in front of the display one cannot but be mesmerised by her presence and performance: eyes closed and hands initially still around the objects; then, once the object is removed, her hands start to move, sensing the energy still remaining in the now-empty space.

October was as busy as it gets. The month started with a powerful and moving Inaugural Makereti Lecture by the eminent Maori scholar, Linda Tuhiwai Smith. Together with the Atlantic Institute and the School of Anthropology and Museum of Ethnography we hosted a delegation of 40 young Maori scholars and elders. They all came to celebrate Makereti Papakura (1873-1930, Fig. 2), and to engage with the Museum's holding of Makereti artefacts in a session organised by assistant curator Philip Grover and Deputy Director Christopher Morton.

A week later, we opened a new display called '*Wandering in other Worlds'*, co-curated by Alexander Varlamov, Galina Veretnova, Anya Gleizer and deputy head of collections Faye Belsey. This resulted from the 2019 research by Anya Gleizer, Jaanika Vider and Pablo Fernandez on Evenki artefacts originally collected in Siberia by Maria Czaplicka in 1914. Galina choreographed a reconciliation with help from Evenki elders, performed in October by eight PRM staff, and we would like to thank our MP Anneliese Dodds for ensuring Galina's visa. The purity of Galina's voice and drumming and Anya's intense dance performance at our Late-Night event captivated our audience (Fig. 3).

At the end of October, Marina de Alarcon (Head of PRM Collections) and I were invited by the US secretary of State to join an international delegation of the Whitehouse Interagency subcommittee for International Repatriation in San Diego, Arizona and Oklahoma. Our opening lecture was at the 2022 Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries and Museums (ATALM) International Conference in Temecula. This drew 1250 representatives of Native American tribes from across the USA and we have started looking for ways we might forge new pathways towards repatriation of ancestral remains.

Such efforts by community delegates are described as healing work, and we feel hugely privileged to be able to be part of this new chapter of the Museum's engagements with communities across the world.

Laura van Broekhoven, *Director*

Fig. 2. Maggie (Makereti) Papakura writing at her desk in Tuhoromatakaka c.1910. Accession number 1998.277.19.1

Fig. 1. Witch's ladder made of rope tied with feathers, England. Accession number 1911.32.7

Fig. 3. Evenki artist Galina Veretnova and Pitt Rivers Museum staff performing an Evenki reconciliation ceremony in the Museum.

Photos © PRM

Winifred Blackman and Oxford's first female anthropologists

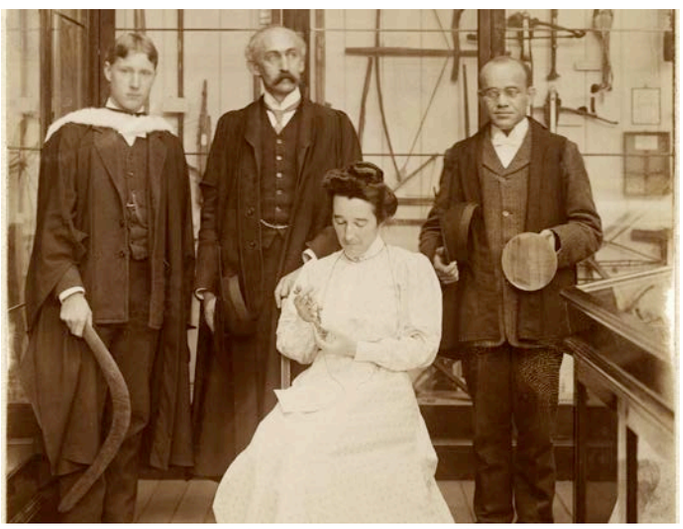


Photo: © PRM

The first Oxford anthropology diploma students with Henry Balfour at the Pitt Rivers Museum, 1908. Left to right: Francis Howe Seymour Knowles, Henry Balfour, Barbara Freire–Marecco, and James Arthur Harley. (1998.266.3).

Photo: © University of Liverpool

Winifred Blackman and her family, c.1890. (D84/3).

Winifred Blackman loved studying at Oxford. When she came up to read for a Diploma in Anthropology in 1912, she was forty years old and had lived with her parents her whole life. At Oxford, she took classes amongst the artefacts in the Pitt Rivers Museum, and in the laboratories of the Natural History Museum next door. Her letters home record a whirlwind of lunches, lectures, books and concerts. "How I do love my life here," she wrote. "It just suits me, it gives one so many chances of learning."

Then, at the beginning of her second year her father died suddenly. Winifred's family had struggled to fund her studies and now her future was in doubt. Determined to stay in Oxford, she wrote to Henry Balfour, the curator of the Pitt Rivers Museum, and asked him for a job. He agreed without hesitation: at the next meeting of the Delegates of the University Museum he requested a grant of £20 "for assistance in cataloguing in the Pitt-Rivers Museum" to fund Winifred's new position.

Photo: © The Garstang Museum of Archaeology, University of Liverpool

Winifred Blackman in Egypt with a group of unnamed Egyptians.

Blackman spent the next seven years working as Balfour's assistant. She was the Museum's first paid female member of staff and hundreds of handwritten catalogue cards survive as her legacy. She received her Diploma in Anthropology in 1915, and later became an expert on the communities of the lower Nile valley in Egypt, where she undertook fieldwork for much of the 1920s and 30s. Balfour and his colleagues on the Committee for Anthropology made her a Research Student and gave several small grants towards her fieldwork in Egypt.

Blackman was one of a remarkable group of women who trained at the Pitt Rivers before 1920 and went on to pursue academic careers in anthropology: Barbara Freire Marreco was among the very first Diploma students and did fieldwork in Arizona and New Mexico; Maria Czaplicka was a Polish student who led an expedition to Siberia; Katherine Routledge worked in East Africa and Easter Island, and the youngest, Beatrice Blackwood, undertook field research in North America and Melanesia.

Oxford was ahead of its time in training women anthropologists: there was only one comparable student at Cambridge before 1920 - the South African, Winifred Hoernle - and no professional female anthropologists were trained exclusively at the University of London until after the First World War.

These Oxford students were pioneers, and in many ways, the University itself was their first field-site. Only a few hundred women studied there at the time. They were not admitted as members and could not take the degrees they had earned until 1920. Women were almost entirely invisible, frequently disdained, and usually made inconsequential to the men they worked alongside. If anthropology was the art and science of being an interloper, then female students at Oxford were perfectly, and sometimes painfully, primed for the job.

The anthropology tutors at Oxford were notably progressive. Balfour's appointment of Winifred Blackman is just one example of the support members of the Committee for Anthropology gave their female students: they offered small grants and modestly paid jobs; wrote letters of reference to secure fieldwork funding, and lobbied editorial boards for publishing contracts on their pupils' behalf.

Blackman and her contemporaries certainly could not navigate as freely as men: they were offered less than they deserved and were grateful. Nonetheless, they were given opportunities no previous generation of women at Oxford had received and seized those opportunities eagerly. When Winifred Blackman wrote to Henry Balfour in November 1913 asking for a job, she was inviting him to open up new horizons with her in more ways than one, and he obliged.

Fran Larson, *Anthropologist and Writer*

Japanese Tea in Wytham Woods

In late May 2022, as part of an event organised by the Friends of the Pitt Rivers Museum, a Japanese tea ceremony was held in Wytham Woods.

A small, portable tea ceremony space with a wooden frame and two tatami mats had been placed in an open grassy space, with an arrangement of flowers from the woods placed in a vase fired in the Anagama kilns further down the hill. Kneeling on the tatami mats, the two people preparing the tea, Masako Sparrow-hawk and Miyuki Chanoyu, whisked the powdered green tea (matcha) in raku tea bowls, fired in the same kilns, and served it together with special sweets to the assembled guests.

Photo: © Louella Matsunaga

Miyuki Chanoyo, kneeling preparing tea and Masako Sparrow-hawk, standing.

Tea has a long history in Japan. First introduced from China in the 8th century, it became associated with Zen Buddhism in the 12th century, and later with the ruling warrior class and the merchant elite. Initially used for medicinal purposes, the practice of the tea ceremony later came to encompass the mastery of prescribed bodily movements for serving tea, and an attention to the setting and the utensils used. Special tea rooms or tea houses may be used to serve tea, and the bowls, tea containers, kettles, and other utensils used are carefully selected and may be very valuable.

Teapot

changes over its history. In Japan the tea ceremony has been used to display power and wealth, as a means of networking, and as a form of bodily and spiritual discipline. Initially practised almost exclusively by men, from the late 17th century it began to be practised by elite women too, and from the late 19th century until the 1960s learning the tea ceremony became one of the skills women should acquire in preparation for marriage (at least among the better off). Since then, it has become more of a leisure pursuit for those interested in the traditional arts of Japan, including both men and women, though still with a large majority of women. Formal training for the tea ceremony is concentrated in a small number of tea ceremony schools and can be expensive. Because of this it is a minority pursuit, but one which has acquired a particular significance as a symbol of Japanese aesthetics and national identity since the 19th century.

For those participating in the tea ceremony, the focus should be on the enjoyment of a bowl of tea, and the appreciation of the surroundings in which it is served. On the website of the Urasenke tea school, one of the major tea ceremony schools in Japan, it says: "the Way of Tea concerns the creation of the proper setting for that moment of enjoyment of a perfect bowl of tea… The perfect tea must therefore capture the flavour of the moment – the spirit of the season, of the occasion, of the time and the place" (*https://www.urasenke.or.jp/texte/chado/chado1.html* accessed 15th November 2022). The event at Wytham Woods, with the woodland setting, the arrangement of seasonal flowers, and the use of bowls fired in the Wytham Woods kilns, encapsulated all these principles – a wonderful occasion, and indeed, a perfect bowl of tea!

Boiling the water

Cleaning the bowl

Whisking the Matcha

Special Matcha sweets

Photos: © Isabelle Eccles

The aesthetics of tea have changed over its history in the Muromachi period (1392-1573) the samurai class collected tea-related utensils imported from China. From the 16th century a different aesthetic, associated with the use of everyday local Japanese items, and an appreciation of rough, asymmetrical pieces became predominant, together with the use of more frugal, apparently natural settings for the tea ceremony. This was called wabicha and was particularly associated with Sen no Rikyū (1522-1591). The three main tea schools that exist today were established in the 17th century by Sen no Rikyū's descendants.

The social context of tea has also seen some major

Dr Louella Matsunaga, *Programme Lead for Anthropology and Geography. School of Social Sciences, Oxford Brookes University*

Identity in Life As Well As Death

There are currently 555 unidentified people listed on the UK missing persons database, people who have died with no one to acknowledge their passing and administer their final wishes. Were these people really alone in the world? Can these remains be individualised in a way that shows respect and acknowledgement rather than simply being a number on a database? This is the basis of my current creative practice and PhD research.

Bioplastic Glove

Some entries within the database are relatively recent, but others date back as far as the mid 1960s. Each individual is listed with a generalised location, description and any potential identifying features and/or belongings, with images included if available. These items and details are often incredibly poignant, but not necessarily complete enough to enable identification. However, the belongings do often show a snapshot of the end of that life and a small glimpse of that person. There is agency within the belongings and the context of death makes these items take on a sense of the funereal, grave goods perhaps, for a journey into the afterlife. Through my work I explore the belongings left as a way to individualise each person and the site of death to explore a sense of remaining presence.

When considering the belongings I began to look at using bioplastics as a creative material to explore these themes. Gelatine Bioplastic is transparent and malleable. It has a ghostly quality, that can physically embody the ideas of something that is missing, barely there. Bioplastic is also ephemeral: it slowly breaks down (just as bodies do) within the environment becoming part of its surroundings. It is made predominantly of water, like humans (and all life forms) and the process of evaporation can be seen to have ghostly qualities, moisture held in the air unseen. I am interested in the impression of continued and/or residual presence within environments, a haunting perhaps, but not in the traditional (supernatural) sense. References to the 'unseen' acting as a metaphor for the unseen in society, the lonely, the homeless or outsiders that many unidentified people inevitably were.

I also consider the surrounding plant material from sites where human remains have been found. Without preservation, human bodies become nutrients, feeding the soil and nourishing plants that often begin to flourish because of the raised nutrient levels. Plants appear to be the 'observers' of these deaths. The conceptual absorption of decomposition continues indefinitely within plant material. As plants die back, they enrich the soil once more.

I am currently creating a piece of work that uses the nettles from the known sites of unidentified individuals to patch and repair a blanket. Nettles have been used forensically, but for me also act as sentinels at the site of death. Nettles are avoided, and this again is a metaphor for the individuals I am exploring. A blanket should be a source of protection and comfort, but when repaired with nettle cordage it ceases to provide either of these things.

With my research I hope to raise awareness of the existence of individuals who have died unnoticed, people who are currently only acknowledged as a reference on a database. With no one to mourn or remember them, these individuals will fade from society's consciousness. By making reference to the belongings that unidentified individuals had with them at the point of their death, I directly connect to aspects of their individuality. This individuality within well-worn belongings is akin to identity in life as well as death.

Katie Taylor, *Artist*

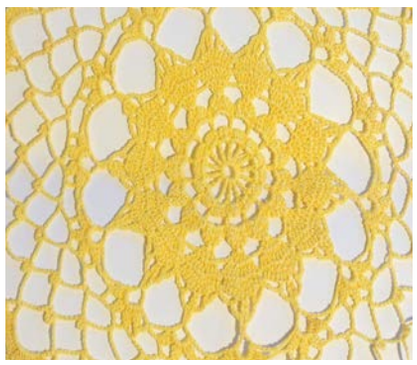
Nettle Blanket

Trainer New Approach

Photos: © Katie Taylor

Caribbean Textiles - Rose Sinclair

Over the last forty years my relationship with the Pitt Rivers Museum has changed from that of a young textiles design student visitor on a research visit observing objects of ancient civilisations, passing through galleries, before creating my own unique textile designs, to one, where I now have conversations with the objects in the gallery.



Cotton table cloth and crochet, Ms Patricia Markes, Jamaica.

Fifteen years after my first visit I returned as a postgraduate student wanting to understand the material culture of the Caribe and Arawak communities of the Caribbean, specifically of Jamaica, the communities that had previously inhabited the island of my parents' birth, to see if there was a textiles tradition that had been handed down.

In searching archives, often the term 'Caribbean' is not one that is used – there is no Caribbean gallery or Museum that specialises in Caribbean art or textiles - you find yourself looking at the Americas or specific islands, using older search terms like 'West Indies', searching by year or historical period. Locating Caribbean textiles means using terms or starting points that you need to know already like 'lace bark cloth' or 'sea island cotton' or researching specific processes (such as weaving, sewing, dyeing) or genres (such as costume, fashion or art). In the Pitt Rivers online catalogue, I search by the country of my parents, Jamaica, and locate woven baskets, references to lace-bark cloth, crocheted/woven plaited baskets, palm leaf braids.

Hand embroidered napkins by The Jamaican Women's League.

Woven basket plaited palm, Ms Patricia Markes, Jamaica.

There is also the wider understanding that Caribbean textiles are an embedded culture of an enslaved society, and, as such, are recorded within the written slave records. Artists such as William Berryman who was active in Jamaica between 1808-1816 depicted island life, with some of his works depicting early attempts at industrialisation of cotton production such as 'bagging cotton'. Other examples of cotton growing can be seen on the islands of St Kitts & Nevis and Barbados, and today sea island cotton is still grown and harvested on Barbados and Jamaica.

Utilitarian products such as flour bags classed as a reusable resource were often cited in newspaper reports of Jamaica's island-wide annual craft fairs, examples in reports of the 1960s discuss displays items like guest towels, household items and clothing made from flour bags then stitched with colourful design. Also discussed were woven plaited palm leaves used to make bags, alongside fine cotton yarn used to create crocheted products for the home.

However, I have found that many textiles are not collected by museums, and thus discussion of their worth is still in transition. Even where they are held and recorded in archives the meta data often reveals little of their past except when and how they were acquired and very little about how they were used and why.

The last ten years of my life have been overtaken with research around the crafting practice of Black women who are part of the Caribbean diaspora, by focusing on women who migrated from the English-speaking Caribbean islands of Jamaica, Barbados, Antigua & Barbuda, Trinidad & Tobago, we can begin to see how textiles can be discussed as part of a culture when so little material evidence may exist or be up to date.

This research has brought me into contact with many more women from across the Caribbean and the islands of Dominica, Guyana, Surinam, Grenada, St Lucia, all willing to share how they learned to craft including weaving, crochet, sewing, quilting, rug making, and dressmaking.

Thus, whilst delving into archives I will also sit with participants of all ages as they discuss the stories behind their precious textiles, mementoes of past voices that belong to mothers or aunties, with vestiges of forgotten crafting projects.

Woven spice basket from Grenada

I put forward an alternate textile archive, a collection that can be placed within museum spaces, either through temporary or permanent installations or workshops, but sit alongside the traditional spaces of the museum offering alternate voices and perspectives to tell stories of lost, new or ongoing material cultures.

Rose Sinclair PhD, *researcher, Lecturer at Goldsmiths University*

First Fieldwork

How has anthropological fieldwork changed over the decades? Zimmer-Tamakoshi's recent edited volume *'First fieldwork: Pacific anthropology 1960-1985'* considers this question from the perspective of anthropologists who undertook their first fieldwork in the Pacific in those years.

The contributors draw attention both to contrasts and continuities. Some note the uncertainty of Pacific fieldwork in earlier decades. Without the internet, yesteryear's novice anthropologists had much less advance knowledge of their prospective field sites. Consequently, there was a greater chance that they might be unprepared for what they found on arrival, and perhaps be forced to shift fieldwork site or topic of study. On the other hand, the formalisation of codes of fieldwork ethics in recent years, and the greater insistence on advance community approval of proposed topics of study, may limit the extent to which today's 'first fieldworkers' can respond flexibly to the local circumstances they encounter on arrival in the field.

Kinden Kulam adorned for Pig Festival dancing.

Today, novice fieldworkers also enter a clearly post-colonial Pacific world. Members of the community under study may well be familiar with the notion of anthropology and expect to read and perhaps contest anything the anthropologist writes in a way that was much less immediate in the past. Earlier 'first fieldworkers', in contrast, often enjoyed a degree of 'white privilege', the aftereffects of the colonisation that had only recently ended.

Reading others' memoirs of their own first fieldwork – of whether they felt adequately prepared for fieldwork by their doctoral supervisors, of difficulties in gaining acceptance in the community, and in crafting there a comprehensible identity as 'anthropologist' – reminded me of three problems I encountered in the initial months of my own 'first fieldwork' in Highland New Guinea 1979-81.

I had certainly had the advantage of having an eminent doctoral supervisor: Andrew Strathern is someone with unparalleled fieldwork experience of Highland New Guinea and who still visits the area regularly. It was Andrew who had suggested to me that the Wahgi Valley was an appropriate place to try to find a community willing to host me and my wife for two years of fieldwork. In due course we found in Kinden Kulam, a Wahgi leader, someone who enthusiastically volunteered to have us live in his settlement. He would become our adoptive father and it was his crucial support over the years that underpinned everything we were able to do. But there were initial hiccups in the relationship. Kinden was dismayed that we weren't restricting the modest payments which we made for assistance to his immediate settlement alone. He had taken the risk of hosting these unlikely young whites, without even a vehicle of their own. Why should others benefit? We could only explain that our work wouldn't go 'straight' unless we had a wider range of information than his immediate kin alone could provide.

The second initial problem that arose was one, we suspected, that originated with Kinden's political rivals, envious of the support we were providing him. I was accused of wandering in the graveyard at night, siphoning off ancestral power which I was said to be magically converting into the goods in our house. I could only counter our accusers' threat to write to the government and demand our expulsion by reiterating that our fieldwork permits were in order and inviting our accusers for a meal to explain again what we were trying to do.

The third problem came from an external source: from another anthropologist who had earlier worked in the area, and felt I was poaching on their academic territory. Muted threats reached me via the university in the capital that we might have to relocate ourselves. Fortunately, these came to nothing.

As the contributors to *'First Fieldwork'* show, many anthropologists of my generation encountered similar issues, if not identical ones. What really helped explain and consolidate our own presence in our Wahgi Valley community was the arrival one day in a Landcruiser of my doctoral supervisor, together with Ongka, his own charismatic, torrentially articulate sponsor in nearby Hagen society. Self-evidently a leader (he had recently starred in the Granada Television documentary 'Ongka's Big Moka'), Ongka captivated Kinden and others. "When you first get them", Ongka explained of hosting young anthropologists, "they're rubbish poor and you wonder what use they are. But they are like seeds, you must plant them, and tend them, and teach them, and then – THEN! - you reap the benefits".

Ongka and Andrew's visit offered a successful model for our adoptive community of what 'anthropologist' might mean. Hardly had the Landcruiser's departing dust subsided before senior Wahgi men said they would now tell us things they'd earlier decided to withhold. And over three fieldwork trips we have done our best – though never enough - to provide at least some of the benefits Ongka alluded to.

Michael O'Hanlon,
Curator Emeritus; Honorary Research Associate

Asmat Woodcarving and Relations with Ancestral Spirits in an Era of Church and State

Asmat people, hunter gatherers who live along the southwest coast of Papua, Indonesia, make woodcarvings to mediate relationships with the spirits of their forebears and other non-visible agencies. Asmat understand their world in broadly animist terms, perceiving events to be shaped by a wide variety of spirits that exist across the boundary between life and death. Often incorporated within broader cycles of ritual feasting, woodcarving engages a particular category of spirit: '*ndumup'*, which help animate the life of each type of being. Through carving, ndumup can be induced to support the maker's plans. While engaging with ndumup spirits is an everyday part of Asmat life, woodcarving allows people to engage a variety of ndumup through multiple semiotic strategies at the same time. Carvers propitiate ndumup in several ways: by making their forms and incising motifs '*vó'* or correctly; through the use of carving materials, in which the ndumup of the felled tree persists in the wood; via naming carvings after deceased relatives; and through the haptic connection between carver and carving, which imbues the object with the ndumup of its maker.

Photo: © Dr Tom Powell Davies

Fig 1. Er villagers felling a tree to make into a shield.

Photo: © Dr Tom Powell Davies

Fig 2. Martinus Jiwiju carving a shield, Er village.

Photo: © PRM

Fig 3. Asmat shield from the collection of the Pitt Rivers museum, accession number 1970.18.1 .

When Asmat people engage with non-Papuan others, this is often around woodcarvings. This reflects a broader pattern in which 'art' is the ground on which indigenous people and their inter-ethnic others relate. During my eighteen months of doctoral fieldwork between 2017-2018, Asmat villagers told me that the central challenge in their lives was negotiating the competing demands of ancestral custom, missionary Catholicism and the Indonesian state, which they hoped to organise so that they are "mutually supporting". Asmat people use the relation-making capacities of woodcarving both to engage church and state others, and to call on the ndumup spirits of their forebears to help them do so.

The mediation of custom/church/state relations through woodcarving is reflected in the collection history of a war shield (accession number 1970.18.1) in the Pitt Rivers museum, which entered the collection in 1970. Following the 1963 Indonesian takeover of Papua (then 'Netherlands New Guinea'), Indonesian state officials banned Asmat ritual feasting between 1964-1974 in the name of "pacification". This led Asmat people to largely cease carving. Catholic missionaries in the area, hoping to support Asmat "culture" in the context of a Vatican II era commitment to developing a locally-meaningful form of Catholicism, supported a rejuvenation of woodcarving practices by fostering an art market around it. This centralised custom/church/state relations around woodcarving. Central to this carving renaissance was a church-supported United Nations-funded Asmat "handicrafts"project between 1968-1974, in which collector Jac Hoogebrugge travelled around Asmat buying artefacts, which were then sold to museums around the world – including the Pitt Rivers. Asmat people were not surprised at this outside interest in woodcarving: after all, mediating multiple social relations simultaneously is what woodcarving does.

Today Asmat people and their church and state are still negotiating their relationships with each other around the market for woodcarving. State officials and Asmat carvers use the carving auction at a long-running annual "cultural festival", begun in 1981, to form relations of patronage. Meanwhile, in my fieldsite of Sawa Erma, the village church – which villagers refer to as the *"gereje"*, combining the Indonesian word for church *'gereja'* and the indigenous term for feast house '*je*'– is carved with images of God's creation, and used to hold liturgy framed around the symbolism of ritual feasts. The presence of an Asmat shield in the Pitt Rivers museum is a testament to Asmat people's use of woodcarving to mediate social relationships, and its foundation in the ongoing challenge of balancing the place of custom, church and state in their lives, which continues to figure centrally around woodcarving.

Dr Tom Powell Davies,
Department of Social Anthropology,
University of Cambridge

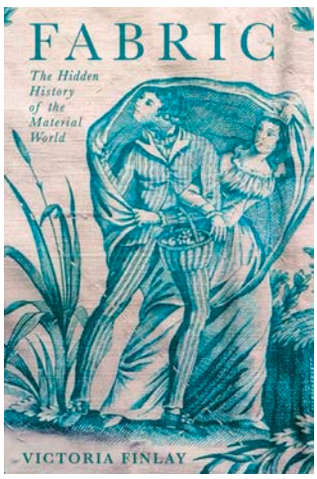
Photo: © Paul Hopmeier

Fig 4. A large crucifix in Sa and Er villages' church, adorned with a carving of Jesus, a crown of thorns, and items associated with ritual leaders.

A Quest for Bark Cloth in Papua New Guinea

One of the Pitt Rivers Museum's treasures is a small leather-bound book cataloguing cloth collected during Captain Cook's Pacific voyages. It has just eight printed pages, but the real story is held in the samples of bark cloth contained in it.

It's one of 70 known copies of the book, published by Alexander Shaw of 379 Strand in London in 1787. I haven't seen the Pitt Rivers edition, but while researching my latest book, *'Fabric: The Hidden History of the Material World'*, I had the chance to see and touch the British Library's version, where I examined it surrounded by several of the British Library's conservators.



Book cover in turquoise blue

One piece of cloth was used "for bedding". It was indescribably soft, like a chamois cloth; another was painted with a design like musical staves; another, thicker and waxy, was stained with red and valuable because it was more waterproof than the rest.


Jane Oiro demonstrates making the red paint


Victoria Kunei designing tapa at home

A few weeks later, after a year trying to arrange a visit to people who still make bark cloth, I got an email from Papua New Guinea. The elders of the Maisin tribe in Collingwood Bay, on the southeast coast, had agreed to a visit. They would show me the making of bark cloth, known throughout the Pacific as tapa.

The Maisin villages are astonishingly beautiful, set along a bay crowned with coconut trees, with a background of ancient forests rising to mountains in the distance. There are only about 3,000 Maisin speakers: it's different from all the other 700 languages of Papua New Guinea, and they're proud of that.


Quincy Siroven demonstrates how to beat tapa

After my photographer friend and I arrived and were welcomed, the elders said the women, the traditional tapa makers, would show us the next day how it was made. "Was there anything we wanted to do that first afternoon?"

I suggested popping over to the mulberry tree gardens to see the trees growing. Everyone laughed. "You can't just pop to a garden", said elder Adelbert Gangai. "They're seven kilometres away and you have to walk through rivers to get there."

Next morning, I was woken before dawn to the sound of women sweeping their homes and surroundings. Later, still before the sun had risen, I heard the bam, bam, bam of wood against wood - the sound of the inner bark of the paper mulberry tree, just a hand's-width wide when it's stripped from the trunk, being beaten into a skirt or a loincloth, the material expanding quickly, like pastry straight from the fridge.

Later, we saw the whole process in a glorious demonstration in the central area of the village, with each of the five clans showing a stage of the process: cutting, beating, mending the holes, painting the outlines of the design ("you have to chew betel to do good design" they told us), filling in the lines with red.

The other women watching said the work was good because they and their children had learned something new that day.

Afterwards, the elders told us how big Malaysian and Indonesian logging companies had been trying to buy or steal their ancestral forests, home of the biggest butterflies in the world. It had seemed the villagers would have to sell in order to afford necessities that could only be paid for in currency: a schoolteacher, medical supplies, boat fuel to get to hospital. However, with the help of Greenpeace and other bodies, they'd found new markets for their tapa and managed to earn enough to hold out. Bark cloth is saving their forest.

When I revisit the Pitt Rivers bark cloth collection, I'll imagine the sounds of tapa making: the clap of wood on wood in the morning air, the soft voices of children and the collaborative chat over the painting.

My book contains many stories of my journeys to places where special cloth originates: Guatemala's backstrap weaving, Assam's ahimsa silk, where the moths aren't killed in their cocoons, Harris's tweed, Ladakh's pashmina, and more.

Victoria Finlay,
Author of Fabric: The Hidden History of the Material World, Profile Books.


Velma Joyce demonstrates design


Jane Oiro cuts down a paper mulberry tree

Photos: © Katia Marsh

A Hand-made Rickshaw from Bangladesh

Virginia Bond Korda, who died earlier this year, was a passionate collector of ethnographic textiles and artifacts. Inspired by the discovery of some printing blocks in Manama souk in Bahrain, she travelled to India to learn more about textiles and textile manufacture. She worked for the Seychelles Government, training young people in producing printed textiles, and later started her own business for the study and dissemination of knowledge of traditional ethnographic textiles. She would spend half the year travelling to remote minority groups researching techniques and traditions and collecting, and the rest of the year offering lectures and selling exhibitions for museums and art schools. Through this, she built up a significant collection of ethnographic textiles and artefacts, representing a lifetime passion. Before her death, she donated part of her collection - textiles from India, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal - to the Pitt Rivers Museum.

One of her most treasured possessions was a rickshaw she had made for her in Bangladesh. She wrote the story of how she acquired it:

"Whilst working in overseas development in the 1990s I saw a great variety of rickshaws in many countries. I was particularly struck by their colourfulness in Bangladesh where they are not just a functional mode of transport, they are works of art. Elaborately hand-painted and decorated, the epitome of kitsch - all frills, flowers and streamers, they light up what can otherwise be a somewhat dismal and poverty-stricken landscape. I decided to buy one. It seemed like a good idea at the time as they say.

The rickshaw

Virginia on her rickshaw

I imagined that I would go to a rickshaw shop and maybe look at some pattern books. But no, there are no rickshaw shops. My driver took me to a market where he guided me to a wheel market, a frame market, a handlebar market, a saddle market and so on. Next we took all the parts to a mechanic, then took the basic tricycle to the carpenter to build the passenger seat, then to the rivet wallah to case it in tin, then to the canopy maker to sew the appliqué patterns and make the curtains, then to the artist to paint the pictures and add my daughter's name to the back, then finally to the decorator to add the streamers. The process ended up taking about six weeks and involved at least half a dozen craftsman and a great deal of ingenuity recycling waste materials (including flattened Coke cans!).

However, when my work in Bangladesh was finished and I dismantled the rickshaw in order to ship it home, the potential bribes and freight costs required to get it out of the country ran into the region of £5000! So I left it with my boss who eventually brought it back to Holland in her 'diplomatic bag' of personal effects. I borrowed a van and drove over to Holland to collect it. I started reassembling it in my living room, but despite having taken photographs at all stages of the dismantling, found I simply couldn't manage it on my own.

I was very fortunate to find a local man of the old school who helped me rebuild the rickshaw in my cottage - one of a dying breed of practical men who can fix, build and mend anything.

Sadly we discovered that my front door, despite being a wide chapel door, would not allow the rickshaw to pass out! So we split it in two, reassembled it in the garden and I rode it to a local barn where a kind neighbour had offered storage."

Jane Weeks, *Friend*

Friends of The Pitt Rivers Museum Winter 2023

INFORMATION SHEET

The Friends' Magazine is published three times a year

INFORMATION

Friends

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Annual Subscription: £36 (Joint: £50); Student: £20 (18-25, in full time education). Life £500 (Joint £750) Benefits: Priority booking for Museum events and courses, Private views, Behind the scenes visits. Members-only: Shop 10% discounts, Friends Members' Magazine posted to you three times a year, Friends' lecture series.
President of Friends of Pitt Rivers: Professor Chris Gosden
Patrons of Friends of Pitt Rivers: Alexander Armstrong, Danby Bloch, Professor Sir Barry Cunliffe, Dame Penelope Lively, Layla Moran MP, Sir Michael Palin, Sir Philip Pullman.

Museum

Pitt Rivers Museum, South Parks Road, Oxford OX1 3PP
01865 270927
www.prm.ox.ac.uk
Email: prm@prm.ox.ac.uk
Open: Tuesday-Sunday 10.00 - 17.00
Monday 12.00- 17.00
Admission FREE.
Refreshments. The Horsebox Coffee Company on the lawn is open from 9.00 - 17.00 daily, serving hot and cold drinks and homemade cakes. With delicious locally roasted coffee, scrumptious brownies, flapjacks and cookies, the Horsebox Café is the perfect place for a coffee break!
After Hours
Occasional themed evening events.
All museum events: see **www.prm.web.ox.ac.uk/events**

Magazine

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www.prm.web.ox.ac.uk/events

MUSEUM DIARY DATES

The Museum is open and pre-booking is no longer required.
We look forward to welcoming you to the galleries, exhibitions and events.

Exhibitions and case displays

Installation
24 September 2022 - 2 April 2023
Marina Abramović
The doyenne of performance art, presents a site-specific installation featuring video and drawings following a research residency at the PRM in 2021.


Photo: © Tim Hand
The Witch's Ladder

Archive Case first floor extended to 19 February 2023
Footprints in the Sand of Time
A case display relating to the life and work of archaeologist O.G.S. Crawford (1886-1957).


Photo: © Institute of Archaeology, University of Oxford. O.G.S. Crawford Photographic Archive 2.43

Long Gallery and Special Exhibition Space. 27 January 2023 - 7 January 2024
UNMASKED - Spirit in the City
Co-curated by artist Zina Saro-Wiwa and anthropologist David Pratten, this new exhibition fuses art and anthropology to unmask the violence and vulnerability of life in Nigeria's oil capital Port Harcourt.


Photo: © Zina Saro-Wiwa

Museum Trail
From 12 December
'His Dark Materials'
Follow in the footsteps of Lyra as props from the BBC HBO production of '*His Dark Materials*' go on display amongst the permanent collections. Pick up a trail to help you find the film props alongside the Arctic objects, armour and instruments which inspired Philip Pullman.


Photo: © PRM
Lyra's coat from '*His Dark Materials*' on display at Pitt Rivers Museum

FRIENDS' DIARY DATES

Future talks will be held in person and on Zoom with captions. Information on accessing these talks is provided to Friends via electronic communication from the Pitt Rivers Museum. An easy way to watch and enjoy the speakers from the comfort of your home!

2023

Talk: Mohammad Al Awad
Wednesday 18 January, 18.00
Mohammad speaks about his experience at the PRM and '*Multaka Oxford*' acting as an ambassador to the culture and civilization of human exchange and cooperation reflected in our museum.


Photo: © PRM

Talk: Ethiopic Scriptures
Wednesday 15 February, 18.00
Dr Jacopo Gnisci and Dr Cesar Merchan-Hamann discuss their research on the lavishly illustrated Ethiopic Scriptures in the Bodleian Library giving insights into the life and culture in which the manuscripts were produced.


Photo: © Bodleian Library
The Evangelist Luke holding a page and a pen, Four Gospels, MS Aeth. c. 2, fol. 58v

Event: KK Day - Migration
Saturday 11 March 10.00 -14.00
The annual Kenneth Kirkwood Day is organised by Shahin Bekhradnia and consists of four speakers discussing migration from two points of view. The classical nomadic pastoralists vs today's political/economic refugees. The ticket price includes lunch and refreshments. Details to follow.


Photo: © PRM
Photographer Wilfred Patrick Thesiger in 1964. View of Bakhtiari migration party moving across a valley. (2004.130.19777.1)

Further information, please contact julieteccles@virginmedia.com.