

The Friends of the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford Magazine



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Cover image: Sydney Parkinson, Frontispiece to *A Journal of a Voyage to the South Seas*, in His Majesty's Ship, the Endeavour. London: 1773. From article on page 8.

Between Friends

What a privilege it is to write the 'Between Friends' column. Fearsome too, to try to fill the shoes of my eminent predecessor, but the transition of roles in many cultures has often been marked by ordeals of courage. Mine - which of course is really a pleasure - is just to now say something about my relationship with the museum. As a biologist who grew up locally, I spent many hours of my youth in the Museum of Natural History next door. I was always drawn towards the Pitt Rivers though. I love the adjacency of the two museums: humans as just a part of the natural world on one side of that gothic door, and the utter uniqueness of humanity on the other; crossing the threshold still feels like an epiphany in either direction. Inside the search would begin, as now, for yet another object in the gloom whispering of my own or other cultures in other times.

The simpler objects are often my favourites, such as the locally found sections of floor tiled with bone that are under...well, I won't say where, you can find them yourselves should you wish. I once fancifully imagined I might be the only person ever to have noticed them, but a photograph of one in the last issue has shattered that illusion! They are just one example of the many expressions of ingenuity of the kind rarely kept and forgotten anywhere else but here. This is what the Pitt Rivers does, it recalls the myriad material facets of being human, from the whimsical to the profound, of the edifying and the despicable. It records the shared experience of being human and in doing so challenges prejudice and division. It is at once fun, fascinating, challenging, and important. But, Friends, you knew that already.

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



Photo © Anthony Flemming

Editorial



Photo © Dawn Osborne

I was delighted to read (see Museum News and From The Director on the next page) that our lovely museum is bouncing back and there is plenty of good news to celebrate. As I write, the news about the Omicron variant is breaking and so I am very much hoping that it will prove relatively harmless and not affect the progress being made in opening up the Museum fully again.

The Magazine has, of course, continued uninterrupted during the Pandemic and I want to thank the Director and all the staff at the Museum and my editorial, design and distribution teams for their part in that. I was hoping to travel again next year as I don't remember the last time I didn't travel abroad for almost a two year period. Whatever happens, I hope that this issue will transport you, geographically, to places including to China, Mexico, New Zealand and Brazil, and also in time as articles mention the Neolithic, the 18th, 19th and early 20th Centuries, and

the so called 'dark ages' that everyone seems to agree were anything but, certainly if you take a global view.

I am also delighted to contemplate the future: the increased possibilities due to the greater involvement of the Museum in the activities of the Friends and the Magazine (see the results of the EGM covered on Page 4), the efforts to conserve the collections for generations to come and to make sure the Museum is as inclusive as possible for everyone (see the drawers and labelling projects mentioned on Page 5).

It is lovely to see the Pandemic and lockdown resulting in many creative solutions including efforts of our events team allowing Friends' events to continue online including our Kenneth Kirkwood event (covered on Pages 6 and 7) and how Joy Hendry has managed to write novels using her anthropological experience (see Page 11). If Friends have the time and expertise to write interestingly on a subject suitable for this magazine, we would love to hear from you - please write with your suggestions. Stay safe and we hope to see you in the Museum soon!

Dawn Osborne, *Editor*

Museum News



Photo: © PRM

Visitors are making a welcome return to the Pitt Rivers Museum, with over 60,000 through our doors during the three months since we reopened in August. UK visitors are now coming from across the country; we are not yet seeing the same level of international visitors as before the lockdown, although their numbers are slowly growing. School groups are also back, creating a lively and engaged atmosphere.

We have strengthened the Pitt Rivers team since lockdown started: Fernando Calzado and George Kwaider have commendably provided support and we have welcomed three new members of visitor staff: Colton Braddyl Brown, Nikita Cooke Smith and Tayo Jones. The new GLAM (Gardens, Libraries and Museums) team now provides additional support staff to all the museums when needed.

The Pitt Rivers shop continues to be co-located with the

Museum of Natural History, an arrangement that was set up as part of Covid adjustments. We are very pleased to be launching some wonderful new cards, gift ranges and our own Pitt Rivers Gin - just in time for Christmas! Friends should remember to take advantage of their 10% discount in the shop.

As we move towards the end of the year, I'm delighted to be able to share with you the news that we have just received landmark funding – a £1m donation to support the multi-award-winning and innovative *Multaka-Oxford* project. This brings the different views and knowledge of people settling in Oxford to the University Museums and sets out to tell their wide-ranging stories. The donation, from the international philanthropic organisation Alwaleed Philanthropies, will allow us to continue *Multaka-Oxford* for another 5 years and to work with 200 volunteers. The project will be co-delivered by the Pitt Rivers and History of Science Museums.

I wish everyone a restful Christmas and a peaceful New Year!

Karrine Sanders PRM Chief Operating Officer

From the Director



Autumn is around us and the Pitt Rivers Museum is buzzing with activity again. School bookings are busy, our events programmes are picking up again and behind the scenes teaching and research are busier than ever. Although we are not yet back to our pre-pandemic visitor numbers, it has been a pleasure to see the Museum come to life with stories of visitors inspired by what they find.

The *Beyond the Binary* exhibition has proven to be our most popular yet. As part of it, a wall was set up for people to give feedback. The response has been overwhelming and there are now several walls of this exhibition filled by visitors leaving their thoughts and love. We are even

thinking of compiling them in a book to share with all of you.

Visitors to the Museum are also finding that the drawers under our Court and Lower Gallery cases have been transformed by the Conservation team, guided by Clothworkers' intern Rebecca Plumbe (see article in this issue in page 5). Previously, the objects in these drawers were piled one on top of each other, making them hard to access and at risk of damage. The lack of organisation also made research difficult and pest control nearly impossible. Now, the drawers are beautifully laid out, sometimes with over 100 objects in a single drawer; our collections team is working to provide information on each. As part of the project, some 9000 objects have received conservation care and 6000 objects have been photographed for the first time. This is a wonderful resource, especially for the youngest children, but all are welcome to wander, wonder and be inspired.

As our online Digital Report shows, the pandemic has helped us reimagine the digital and find new ways of working, but being back in the museum does feel uniquely wonderful.

Laura Van Broekhoven Director

New Friend

Dr Chris Lawes, Oxford.

To learn more about the benefits of becoming a Friend, or if your details change, please contact the membership secretary **Beth Joynson**, ea@prm.ox.ac.uk or **01865 613000**

Extraordinary General Meeting



Karrine and Gillian discussing the new PRM-FPRM relationship

This is a transcript of the Chair's report that introduced this meeting, which was held digitally on July 20th 2021

Thank you all for coming to this meeting and thank you for your membership of the Friends of the Pitt Rivers Museum. Being a Friend gives each of us a sense of belonging to this outstanding museum. The organization of its displays portrays a sense of the commonality of humanity in both time and geography. There are so many aspects of today's world that emphasise the fundamental importance of this outlook.

Keeping the Friends going as a viable organization has been hard work for all those who have contributed to it over the past few decades. Sadly, the demands on our lives are such that it has not been possible to find other volunteers to take on the key roles. As a result, some of us have overstayed the time periods set in the FPRM's constitution. I would particularly like to pay tribute to Rosemary King, who has served as Membership Secretary for 17 years.

It has therefore become necessary to find a new way to continue, by becoming more integrated with the Museum. Before I explain this, I would like to thank two Friends who are willing to remain in their present honorary posts: Dawn Osborne and Juliet Eccles. Dawn is willing to serve for a second 5-year term as Editor of our successful and enjoyable magazine when her first term comes to an end next year; Juliet will continue to organize our events – lectures, small meetings and Awaydays, with as much input in terms of ideas and help as other members are able to offer. Juliet also looks after the design and publication of the magazine. Very warm thanks to both of you.

I am also delighted to confirm that our President, Professor Chris Gosden, will continue in that role. Chris is Oxford University Professor of European Archaeology, Director of the OU Institute of Archaeology and a Trustee of the British Museum. It is a privilege to have him as our

President.

Two of the key volunteer roles that will be taken over by PRM staff are those of the Treasurer, Paul Goose, and the Membership Secretary. These roles will be taken over by Nicole Cunningham and Beth Joynson, respectively. Many of you know Beth, who was responsible for security at our lectures, in the days when we met in the PRM lecture room. Hopefully, face-to-face meetings will resume in the not-too-distant future; a zoom element will be an advantage too, as it enables more distant and less able-bodied Friends to join in. I would also like to thank Marian Nicholls for all her work organizing and sending out Mailchimp messages about our meetings, including this one. Beth has kindly agreed to take on this task.

I have now chaired the Friends' Council for seven years and will stand down after this meeting, assuming that the vote for the Museum to take on the administration is positive. Instead of the Friends' Council there will be a Liaison Committee chaired by Karrine Sanders, who is Head of the Museum's Administration, Planning and Finance. I will serve on this committee for a while, along with another Friend, Anthony Flemming. Anthony has kindly agreed to take over writing the 'Between Friends' article in the Magazine. I hope he will continue to do this.

*The meeting ended with a vote on the motion: **"The Friends of the Pitt Rivers Museum agree to become part of the Pitt Rivers Museum's organizational structure according to the terms set out in the Asset Transfer Agreement published by themselves and the Chancellor, Masters and Scholars of the University of Oxford"**.*

The motion was passed nem con.

Gillian Morriss-Kay, Member of PRM Liaison Committee and Friend

What's in our Drawers:

Transforming a Hidden Collection at the Pitt River Museum

As many visitors to the Pitt Rivers Museum have discovered, you will certainly not be short of things to see. Since October 2019 the 'What's in our Drawers?' project, funded by the Clothworkers' Foundation and the Delafield Fund, has worked to completely transform the 263 publicly accessible display drawers located in the Court and Lower Gallery. Not only has this allowed another exciting dimension of the collection to be made accessible, it has also vastly improved collections care for the hundreds of objects housed in these drawers.

For a number of years the drawers had been used as 'overspill' to house objects from the collection. With objects accumulating in these spaces over time, the drawers had become overcrowded, resulting in damage to the collection. It was also increasingly difficult to monitor the collection for pest activity, as well as making object retrieval very difficult. Not only did these problems impact collections care, they also made it difficult for visitors to engage with the drawers as objects were covered by packing material, stacked on top of one another and lacked contextual information.

To address these issues, the project used laser cutting technology to create custom housings made from an inert conservation grade material (Plastazote). To do this, the contents of each drawer needed to be rationalised as not everything would be able to go back on display. With objects displayed by type, curation was not a straightforward process, especially when dealing with a wide range of materials that often reflected one kind of item. Many objects also had complicated histories and labels that included racist or colonial terminology. Therefore, it was important to consider how object stories could be told in a more sensitive and representative way.

After objects were selected for redisplay, a digital outline of the new drawer layout was created using Adobe Illustrator. To do this, a photograph of the objects positioned in their new layout from above was imported into



Some of the many drawers that can be opened by the public in the Court. A total of 203 drawers have now been transformed as part of this project.



After transformation. The wax offerings are now safely housed in their custom-made laser cut housing.



Now rationalised and re-displayed, these amulets and charms can be seen together and encourage visitors to make connections between objects.



Rebecca preparing a drawer for re-displaying objects. The new Plastazote insert fits snugly into the drawer, creating a safe environment for the collection to be housed

Illustrator and scaled to real size. An outline was then drawn around each object to create vector paths for laser cutting. The finished digital layouts could then be programmed and laser-cut to produce the new Plastazote housings. The resulting housings could be easily slotted into each drawer to provide a cushioning buffer against the actions of opening and closing when the drawers are accessed by visitors, as well as making the space look like an intentionally curated display.

Conservation work, to enable redisplay of some objects, was carried out alongside this process. Treatment ranged from re-bonding broken ceramic objects, humidifying textiles, carrying out tear repairs on paper items, and creating support fills on votive biscuits, amongst other interventions. As part of this work, mounts and padded boards were also made to support objects going back on display. This was a fantastic opportunity to stabilise material and increase the number of objects that could be made accessible to the public.

At the time of writing, the project has successfully transformed 203 drawers. Other outcomes include:

- Total number of objects redisplayed: 5056
- Objects that have received remedial conservation treatment: 102
- Adjustments for display, including making object mounts and padded boards: 358
- Number of objects frozen to prevent pest infestation: 20

The work carried out on the drawers has had a significant impact on a hidden space in the museum, opening up opportunities for visitors, Front of House staff and educational outreach to engage with these collections in a more meaningful way, both now and in the future. It is hoped that the project's legacy will continue to be felt for many years to come.

Rebecca Plumbe, Clothworkers' Foundation Conservation Intern

Photo © John Cairns

Photo © Rebecca Plumbe

Photo © Rebecca Plumbe

Photo © John Cairns

Kenneth Kirkwood Day Online: The following two articles follow our successful online KK Day event on the subject of Gardens for Health and for Pleasure.

Derek Jarman: gardening against the odds



Derek Jarman in his garden at Prospect cottage

Derek Jarman acquired Prospect Cottage, a fisherman's shack on the shingle at Dungeness in 1987, when he came across the building with a 'For Sale' sign while filming on the beach with Tilda Swinton and his partner Keith Collins. Having been diagnosed with HIV on 22 December the previous year, Jarman had resolved 'to get as much out of life as possible' and quickly put in an offer. It was menacingly overlooked by a nuclear power station, and on 18th August 1987, Jarman wrote in his diary 'The shingles preclude a garden'. This disadvantage was exacerbated by low rainfall, wind, and salt from the sea. However, by the following year Jarman had abandoned his own conclusion of the site and started making a garden in earnest. Prospect Cottage is not, as is sometimes assumed, a garden of beachcombed stones and sculptures and 'right plant, right place'. It is a wilful fusion of Jarman's fantasies with that environment. The garden took shape as both an adaptation of existing vegetation and continued experiments in plant purchases achieved by a lot of carrying and digging in bags of soil and compost with stones replaced on top. The only contemporary garden to be made without a boundary, it

is one of the most influential gardens of modern times. Making the garden became inseparable from his illness. In his writings, in particular *Modern Nature* (1989), he described how gardening became his anchor:

"I have never been happier than last week. I look up and see the deep azure sea outside my window in the February sun, and today I saw my first bumble bee. Planted lavender and clumps of red hot poker."

In 1990 Jarman's health deteriorated sharply: he was admitted to hospital four times with tuberculosis of the liver, a form of pneumonia that is an AIDS-related condition, appendicitis, and toxoplasmosis that attacked his eyesight. He decided to take the controversial drug AZT and whilst he had periods of relative good health the disease was beginning to gain ground and drain his energy. He would spend his time in the garden recuperating from bouts of illness and the garden often provided him with relief from the pain and side effects from the drug therapies he was reliant on.

Although his illness took its toll, Jarman continued to work at the forefront of gay rights activism, challenging homophobic abuse and society's treatment of those suffering with HIV and AIDS. His illness became a more central theme within his

work but it was never to consume it fully. His concerns around the natural world and the environment intensified in the years he lived at Prospect Cottage and he started to explore them in his work. In 1992 he produced two large works *Oh Zone* and *Acid Rain* which highlighted his concerns about man's effect on the natural world. The period he spent at Prospect Cottage was immensely creative. He created several other bodies of new artwork. For the first time in many years he reintroduced three-dimensional items into his works, incorporating found objects from the beach into his tar paintings and as sculptural pieces. He produced a series of brightly coloured landscape paintings of Dungeness which explored the area in rich colours and thickly applied impasto paint.

Jarman also continued to work as a film director producing his iconic film *The Garden* (1990) filmed on location at Prospect Cottage. He followed this with *Edward II* (1991), *Wittgenstein* (1993) and *Blue* (1993). The garden gave him respite from the stresses of his illness and provided him with artistic inspiration; it also gave him a place to escape from the pressure of his punishing work schedule.

Emma House, Curator, Garden Museum

Photo: © Howard Sooley

The Secret Life of the Georgian Garden



Paul Sandby RA, 1731-1809, British, North West view of Wakefield Lodge in Whittlebury Forest, Northamptonshire. Watercolour with pen and ink.

The Georgian landscape garden has been hailed as the greatest British contribution to European Art, and was much imitated from imperial Russia to colonial America. In France it was known as *le jardin anglais*. These gardens can be seen as three-dimensional paintings – beautiful compositions created from grass, trees and water, scattered with ornamental buildings, then known as eye-catchers. Today our vision of these places is usually one devoid of life, save perhaps a flock of sheep, and therefore rather sterile. But what we see today is a poor reflection of what these designs were like in their heyday. Scratch below the surface and history reveals that they were a lot less serene and, in places, a great deal more scandalous. My book about the private life of the Georgian garden, described by The Times as: ‘a pioneering work and... a thoroughly entertaining read’ reveals the previously untold secrets of what the Georgians got up to in their gardens. It explains how by the 18th century there was a desire to escape the busy country house where privacy was at a premium, and how these gardens evolved aesthetically, with modestly-sized, far-flung temples and other eye-catchers, to cater for escape and solitude, as well as more social pursuits. The Georgian garden stimulated multiple senses at the same time – the eye might delight in the view, the nose in the scents from the flowering shrubberies, taste by indulging in eating ice cream in some suitably novel setting – all against a backdrop of music to delight the ear.

The Georgians used their gardens from dawn to dusk – and long after dark. The book follows a hypothetical day in the life of the garden. In summer months especially, the garden performed an essential role in the entertainment of the guests who gathered at the country house. The day often started with a carriage drive around the grounds, the views changing in an almost cinematic manner, as the carriage travelled along. The smooth turf of the parkland provided an antidote to the bad roads of the time, allowing for thrilling carriage driving, in the 18th century equivalent of the Ferrari. En route the party might stop at an eye-catcher, already

glimpsed in the distance. Inside they would find a fine room, already set up with refreshments, such as the then-still-luxurious drink of tea, served on porcelain from the orient, reinforcing the sense of the exotic.

After the excitement of travelling at speed, in the afternoon more serene activities might be called for. This could mean quietly fishing or rowing on the lake. But lakes were also used for more high octane entertainments. At many sites model men o’war were built at the same time as lakes were being created or



Thomas Robins the elder, 1715-1770, British, View of a Gloucestershire Country House: A Garden view, with picnic party in centre foreground, ca 1755, oil, pen, ink on vellum.

altered. These vast expanses of water allowed for mock sea battles with fleets of boats and real cannons.

In the evening, as the light faded, shrubberies were illuminated with a multitude of lamps and the pleasure ground became the scene of entertainments at which the number of guests might run into the tens of thousands – particularly for coming of age or victory celebrations. Musicians would be placed on boats on the lake, or hidden in shrubberies to add a sense of mystery. The darkness and the winding paths through the bushes might also provide privacy for amorous liaisons. These sort of goings-on in Georgian gardens (and secluded buildings within them) are well documented in a number of divorce cases from the time. Back at the scene of the party, the revellers who were just there to enjoy the festivities might be treated to food and wine in specially erected temporary buildings or marquees. A typical evening’s entertainment would end with a spectacular fireworks display.

Dr Kate Feluś, Historian and Author

Did Picasso discover 'primitive art'? Not on your nelly!

Picasso was such a naughty man. A seasoned self-mythologiser, he fashioned his own relation with the truth. Sometimes he said his 1907 visit to the Troc, the national anthropology museum, had opened his eyes, in a flash, to the power of non-European visions. Other times he said the items on display merely confirmed the visual experiments he was already carrying out.

Either way, popular histories of art proclaim it was Picasso who introduced non-Western art to metropolitan audiences. Until then, striking items from beyond the Continent had been seen as 'grotesque', 'curiosities', unworthy of sustained visual attention. His 1907 *'Demoiselles d'Avignon,'* the brothel scene where the heads of the sex workers are clearly congruent with African masks of the time, had changed all that. European aesthetics was redrawn by one painting.

It's such a neat chronology that it's almost a pity, for those who like clearly demarcated histories, that it's untrue. I'm trying to demonstrate that, in a book I'm writing on Western appreciation of non-Western items. Decades before Picasso was even born, many people were well aware that skilled persons in seemingly simple societies were producing visually sophisticated objects. Westerners had long known that gifted and trained members of courtly civilisations produced marvellous items: Mughal, Chinese, and Japanese objects had been appreciated for years. But visitors to a good number of smaller-scale societies, then regarded as 'primitive' or 'savage', were also coming upon visually potent objects in places where they were not expected to occur. It helped if the viewer had an independent eye, detached from contemporary aesthetic prejudice.

Let's start with the terms of debate. Too many modern writers have misunderstood the artistic vocabulary of early commentators. When a literary traveller in the late eighteenth or nineteenth century calls an object 'grotesque', that



Sydney Parkinson, Frontispiece to *A Journal of a Voyage to the South Seas, in His Majesty's Ship, the Endeavour*. London: 1773.

does not mean they are judging it as repulsively ugly: the usual meaning of the term, in our days. Rather, they may well be appraising it as a visually intriguing reassembly of the corporeal, which makes us see our world and ourselves in a potentially different way. And this was seen as positive.

In the same way, a traveller's estimation of an item as a 'curiosity' should not be seen as dismissive, as though 'art' and 'curiosity' were opposed terms. They are not, for 'curiosity' simply means 'visually arresting', 'worth scrutinising', because it is outside the artistic canon of the traveller's time. And the visually arresting may also be the visually telling.

It's relatively easy, if you're self-disciplined and know where to look, to find example after example of captains, adventurers, missionaries, and other voyagers, who laud the

artistry of the people they encounter. Their wonder, or tempered awe, is all the greater if the surroundings seem inhospitable for the production of aesthetic items. It is as though these wide-eyed wanderers thought the chances of stumbling upon great art declined as one went further and further away from the prestigious academies of European capitals.

No one expected to find luminous sculptures in 'darkest Africa': so, all the more marvellous when they did. Travellers sailing up the cold regions of northwest America did not anticipate sighting tall columns of bold colours and bolder design. But that's what they saw. Ignorant arrivals to New Zealand were very taken aback to see the tattoos of Maori males: intricate, finely interlaced, heightening facial contours. Mark Twain said, after the initial shock, he quickly became used to them, and within days thought them 'just the thing'.

I could go on, but I don't have space. You'll have to wait for my book.

Jeremy MacClancy, Professor of Anthropology at Oxford Brookes University

China's Historical Sites and the Cultural Revolution

During the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), the Red Guards set out to delete China's imperial past. Many important monuments, sites and records were vandalised or completely destroyed. In the eastern province of Shandong, the revolutionaries found it easy to descend on major cultural centres including the town of Qufu, where they smashed the tomb of Confucius to pieces. In nearby Weihai (governed by the British from 1898 to 1931), they completed the destruction, begun by the Japanese invasions of the 1930s and 40s, of countless collections of papers and photographs. Weihai thus lost every bit of paper relating to its history.

The depredations of the Red Guards affected the whole country, but due to quirks of geography, some sites survived intact. One of these was Yao Wan Shan, a small sacred mountain in the inland province of Shaanxi. It is dedicated to the founder of Chinese medicine, Sun Simiao, who was born there. Situated about 50 miles south of Xi'an, Yao Wan Shan is a fascinating centre of art and culture. Its sculptures, frescoes and architecture mainly date from the third to the tenth centuries CE. It is known to few Chinese and unknown to most westerners, although occasional intrepid explorers have made their way there over the years. In 1912, one of these was Reginald Johnston, a Scot who became tutor to the last emperor of China. Although I hardly count myself as intrepid, I have twice made the pilgrimage from Scotland to this pleasant little place.



A Yao Wan Shan statue



The Pilgrims' Steps, Yao Wan Shan

Further south, in Sichuan province, the mountain peak area of Leshan was also safe from the revolutionaries. Its most famous landmark is the 71-metre-high giant Buddha carved into the rock wall alongside the river. It is estimated to have taken around 90 years to build, 7-800 years ago.

Yao Wan Shan, the Qianling Tang statues and the Leshan carvings survived by being too far off the beaten

track for the Red Guards to make what at that time would have been an arduous trek to access them. They certainly had their 'tick list' of targets, most of which were the sites that everyone knew about: the "must-see" places to visit and that were in, or close to, the main centres of population. We can only be grateful that the fabulous terracotta army of Qin Shihuang and his tomb site were not rediscovered until the Cultural Revolution had ended.

China has done much to repair the damage to its historical legacy over the past few decades. Confucius's repaired gravestone stands once more. In Weihai, one of the British Commissioners, Sir James Stewart Lockhart, was a man who found it impossible to throw anything away, so when the Chinese Government set out to re-establish the Weihai Archives, they were able to copy all they wanted from his archive of papers and photographs to give their collection a strong foundation. This restoration work has built up an impressive archive, which now acts as a blueprint for other areas to follow. The Tang statues and the Leshan Buddha are now visited by increasing numbers of Chinese tourists driving their own cars. And Yao Wan Shan? It remains a hidden gem.

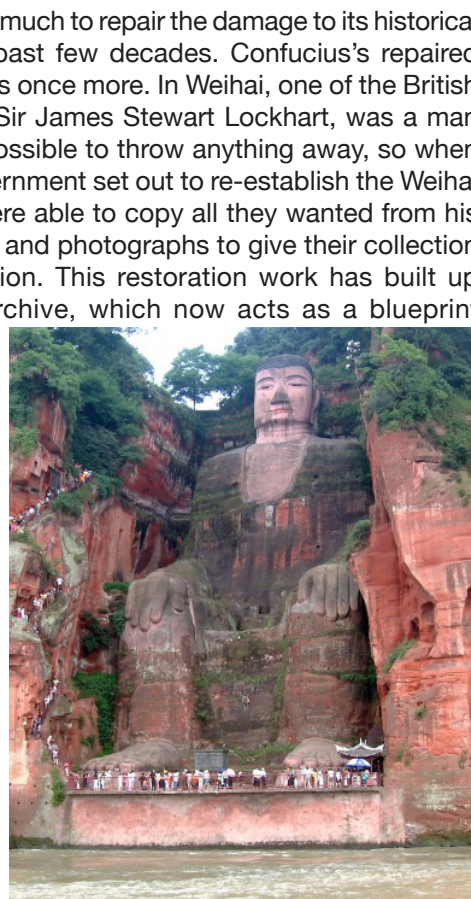
Shiona Airlie,
Author of books on Chinese art and on Scottish links with Chinese history



The Spirit Way, leading to Qianling Mausoleum



The author and one of the guardian statues



Tourists visiting the Leshan Giant Buddha

Photo: © Shiona Airlie, except the Leshan Buddha: Courtesy Ariel Steiner, published under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike Licence

Religion, Ancient and Modern

There has been a longstanding view, dating back to the nineteenth century, that early religions were animist in character. That's to say, they were informal, lacking both religious specialists (priests) and religious spaces (temples), not to mention formal gods, theologically justified moral codes and established rituals.

Like many of the religions of the small scale huntergatherer societies that have survived to the present, these 'immersive religions' were characterised by the induction of trance states, a belief in spirits associated with the landscape (wells, rivers, trees, sacred mountains), and, to some degree at least, the belief that disease, and especially deaths, are due to the evil intentions of human sorcerers or evil spirits.

During the Neolithic, so the argument went, more formal religions appeared, characterised by priesthoods and temples, with organised rituals and theologically justified moral codes. Often, these involved particular gods associated with particular locations. The archaeological evidence associated with these kind of 'doctrinal' religions appears only once settlements are permanent and larger than 300-400 individuals – places like Jericho and Çatalhöyük. Eventually, of course, in the Axial Age these gave rise to the great 'revealed' or world religions with which we are now more familiar.

It seems that these new doctrinal religions did not replace the older, more personalised forms of immersive religion from our huntergatherer past. Rather they were bolted on top of them. We can still see the signal of these early religions in nineteenth century European folklore with its focus on fairy folk, the capacity to walk Narnia-like from one familiar world through into another unfamiliar one, the widespread belief in the 'evil eye' and other magical causes of illness and bad luck. The witch's ladder illustrated here would have had curses or aches and pains inserted with each feather; it would then be hidden in the victim's mattress.

Although we have moved on from these kinds of superstition, that 'raw feels' sense of the old time immersive religions is still very much with us. It lies at the very heart of modern doctrinal and revealed religions. Committing oneself to a religion is not an intellectual journey (though we may provide such justifications after the fact in the form of doctrines and theology), but an emotional one. We feel an intense sense of



Umbanda service in progress, Sao Paolo, Brazil. Notice the variety of religious icons around the room.



Umbanda ritual with one medium (kneeling) going into a possession state. The person standing (centre) and gesturing towards her is the religious leader. Sao Paolo, Brazil.



Witch's ladder

closeness or longing to some kind of divine principle. When this spills over into trance, it creates what medieval Christian mystics like St Teresa of Ávila or Julian of Norwich referred to as being immersed in the 'oneness of God'. We find this in all the major religions: in Islam and Sikhism it is referred to as the 'oneness of being', in Buddhism as being immersed in the 'womb of the Buddha'.

While not all of us can aspire to the mystical heights of the adepts, what seems to be important about taking part in the rituals of religion – and hence the reason religion evolved in the human lineage – is that they activate the brain's endorphin system, creating through that a sense of belonging to a trusted community. This helps keep the community working together rather than being

torn apart by fractious disputes that would otherwise beset groups of the size conventionally found in small scale human societies.

We have tested this in a series of experimental studies conducted in churches in Oxfordshire and Warwickshire, as well as in yoga groups and the churches of an Afro-Brazilian Umbanda religion in Brazil. It seems that taking part in the rituals, whether these are singing, dancing or praying, does elevate pain thresholds (a sign that the brain's endorphin system is being activated), and this in turn gives rise to enhanced feelings of bondedness to the group.

These processes seem to work best on the small scale – essentially the scale of huntergatherer clans and small scale horticulturalists' villages of 100-200 people. It seems that these effects are so consistent that, even today, the ideal size for a church congregation is exactly this size. Any larger than 200, and the congregation loses coherence and is less able to create that magical sense of community; invariably, large churches lose members faster than they can recruit them. Anything smaller than about 100 certainly gains in intimacy (everyone knows everyone else), but it loses the capacity to function as a self-help community.

Robin Dunbar,

Professor of Evolutionary Psychology, University of Oxford
Robin Dunbar's book *How Religion Evolved* will be published by Pelican Press in spring 2022

Writing fiction as an anthropologist

It was during Lockdown that I took to writing fiction, apparently like many others! Since I retired from teaching, I have been introducing anthropology more widely, for example in Scottish schools, and in my local pub quiz. While toying with a chapter of a book I have called *'Tales from the Life of an Anthropologist'* (not yet completed) I was suddenly consumed with the idea of inventing a life I never had. It is, in fact, one I might have had, set in Mexico where I did work for two years as a journalist, and indeed discovered anthropology, but I only did a small research project there.

For Flora, the protagonist of my first novel, who arrives there in 1968, as I did, it was where she stayed, fascinated by the indigenous peoples of Mexico. She continues to study, albeit with a return to her family in Scotland where she is persuaded to register as a postgraduate at the University of Stirling, but she also falls in love with an indigenous Mexican photographer, and they eventually settle in Mexico. That

story took two novels, and the third one tells the tale of their daughter, Xochitl, who is born at sea between Mexico and Scotland, symbolic of her divided loyalties, who does a lot of travelling. She also studies anthropology, but in Aotearoa, where she has some other exciting adventures. She is a good linguist, fluent in Nahuatl as well as Spanish and English, learns Māori,

and is an advocate for Gaelic revival when in Scotland. She also becomes an early activist for reviving and conserving indigenous ways and saving the endangered planet as long ago as 1986, only a year after the discovery of the hole in the ozone layer and the destruction of the first Rainbow Warrior in Auckland harbour.



Mexico

I guess my aim was to identify some of the really positive elements of anthropology through telling a gentle family story. Flora and Angel, Xochitl's father, have to overcome prejudice on both sides, from a big happy Scottish family on Flora's and a sad but loving set of almost coincidental relations on the other, descended from powerful rebels against the European colonial settlers. The couple overcome their distinctive backgrounds, but only through learning in some depth about each other's lives. The first two books were originally called *'Awakening'* (for Flora) and *'Sharing Worlds'* (for Angel and Flora), but professional advice has been to run them together with the second title, and I am presently working on a new draft which I hope

might find a publisher or at least an agent.

The creation of a fictional world was tremendous fun, drew me to my desk with joy as I spent the months of lockdown living alone in Scotland, and sometimes filling my nights with new ideas which dragged me up to make

notes for the following day's storyline. Many friends and former colleagues around the world helped remotely with historical detail, and I did see local (Scottish) friends in the open air, two of whom read the novels as they emerged, encouraging the reinvention of my youth, but checking that the anthropological jargon was kept under control! The life of rewriting and revising is a little less exciting, and now has to be fitted

into emerging old activities as our lives return to the so-called new normal, but I still love the world of Flora and her family, and I hope that her story will eventually achieve my aim of persuading some readers of the great positive value of anthropology!

Joy Hendry, Novelist and Anthropologist



Mexican girls Joy met on her research project in Mexico

INFORMATION SHEET

The Friends' Magazine is published three times a year

INFORMATION

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Annual Subscription: £30 (Joint: £40);
Family (two adults and all their children
under 18 living at the same address): £40;
Over 65: £20 (Joint: £30); Student: £15 (18-25,
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Museum

**Pitt Rivers Museum, South Parks Road,
Oxford OX1 3PP
01865 270927**

www.prm.ox.ac.uk

Email: ea@prm.ox.ac.uk

Open: Tuesday-Sunday 10.00-16.30

Monday 12.00-16.30

Admission FREE.

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Wednesdays 14.30 and 15.15

Volunteer-led introduction to the Museum.

Approximately 20 minutes.

No booking required.

After Hours

Occasional themed evening events.

All museum events: see www.prm.web.ox.ac.uk/events

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The views expressed are not necessarily
those of the Museum. All contributors to the
Magazine are Friends unless otherwise stated.
For further information see:

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

MUSEUM DIARY DATES

The Museum is open and pre-booking
is no longer required. Visitors are
strongly encouraged to wear face
coverings when in the Museum and
there are hand sanitiser points around
the galleries for the use of visitors and
staff.

Please note that over Christmas and
New Year, the Pitt Rivers will be closed
on 24, 25 & 26 December and 31
December & 1 January.

Exhibitions and case displays

Installation Upper Gallery

Until 25 September 2022

**Dwelling: In this
space we breathe**

An exhibition of 9
silkscreen prints by
Gambian-British artist
Khadija Saye who uses
amulets, beads and
horns to explore her
connection to spiritual
practices.



Silkscreen print by Khadija Saye

Photo: © Khadija Saye

Archive Case first floor

Until 31 August 2022

**Footprints in the
Sands of time**

A display of
photographs relating
to the life and work of
archaeologist O.G.S.
Crawford (1886-1957)



Sand Dune

Photo: © Institute of Archaeology University of Oxford

Special Exhibition Gallery

Until 8 March 2022

Beyond the Binary

This co-curated
exhibition is
about queer lived
experiences,
putting the voices
of LGBTIAQ+ communities at the heart,
connecting their voices to you.



Non-binary bow tie.

Photo: © PRM

PRM Website

Digital available

Weaving Connections:

An online exhibition
from the Jenny Balfour-
Paul collection with
perspectives of Multaka
volunteers.



Detail of embroidery from
Asherah nauak (bridal tunic)
(2018.37.42)

Photo: © PRM

FRIENDS' DIARY DATES

Unfortunately, all live FPRM events are
still on hold for the foreseeable future.
This is due to the COVID-19 pandemic
and pandemic and the risks entailed.
Future talks will be held on Zoom.
Information on accessing these talks
is provided to Friends via mailchimp.
An easy way to watch and enjoy the
speakers from the comfort of your
home!

2022

Talk: 'Only keep objects that spark joy'

Wednesday 19

January 2022, 18.00

Alex Chester MA

Student, Anthropology,
Oxford Brookes.

Alex studied u/grad
anthropology with

Oxford Brookes,
graduating 2020, then

was awarded a Sasakawa Foundation

Scholarship to do a Masters by Research

with Oxford Brookes this past academic
year, on the reception in the UK of the

Japanese Marie Kondo organising system
(‘Only keep objects that spark joy.’)



Talk: Whats in our drawers?

Wednesday 16

February 2022, 18.00

Rebecca Plumbe,

Clothworkers'

Foundation

Conservation Intern,

speaks about her

experience of

work transforming,

rationalising, and

redisplaying the drawers

of the PRM.



Photo: © John Cairns

KK Day: Rituals of Death

Saturday 12 March, 2022

Further details to be announced.

Some talks lined up for later in the year are
Joy Hendry, anthropologist, speaking of
her experience writing a novel and John
Bell, geologist, speaking about his film on
Greenland.

Should you know of a person or a subject
that would interest our audience, and to
request further information, please contact
julieteccles@virginmedia.com.