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Pitt Rivers Museum

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Cover image: Otakwan Acahkos Iskwiw, Shane Balkowitsch 2019 (See article on page 4)

Museum Musings

Photo © Anthony Flemming

Who can forget the exhortation of the young Indiana Jones in the opening of *'The Last Crusade'*: "It belongs in a museum!"? Quite right, and yet theft from museums is quite common. Even the Mona Lisa was stolen in 1911, and one unfortunate Rembrandt has been stolen four times. There is a glamour, albeit misplaced, to such crimes with their rooftop daring-do, or sheer bravura. The only notable theft from the PRM was indeed worthy of Arsène Lupin - an old pistol stolen and substituted with a replica in the 1960s: both are now on display. So, perhaps, we should not be surprised at the thefts from the British Museum reported earlier in 2023. The media interest was on one level heartening – we care about our museums – but it also exposed worrying failures as well as a willingness to recruit them to rather distant arguments. For example, the apparent security of the BM was an argument used against object restitution, an argument now debunked by the thefts. This logic is unconvincing in either direction. Thefts can happen anywhere and mostly this was never a good reason for hanging on to a disputed item, conversely restitution is too complex to be resolved by a security argument *per se*. Wherever objects end up, security needs to be balanced with purpose: secretly locked in a bank vault offers the best security, but would undermine the purpose of any museum. The solution is record-keeping. The most surprising aspect at the BM was that the detection and investigation of the crimes was hampered by the items being poorly recorded. Happily, the Pitt Rivers is conspicuously well-catalogued and photographed. This is central to security but, more importantly, it is how collections wherever they are become globally accessible.

Anthony Flemming, *Member of the PRM Liaison Committee*

Photo: © PRM

Smooth-bore revolving pistol, c.1700 (above) and replica made in Hong Kong mid 20th century (below)

Editorial

Photo © Dawn Osborne

Looking at this issue I am proud of the strength and number of different kinds of voices now available here to help us as Members of the PRM and members of humanity to see the world in the round. It is not so long ago in the history of the planet that all voices in museum publications would have been domestic and would have come from the same country, class, race, sex and creed and possibly only from academics. Instead now we hear clearly the voices of indigenous peoples around the world on repatriation issues (see page 3) and they themselves, being heard, can refocus on objects that could be seen as colonial (such as the photographs taken of Native Americans in Washington to sign their lands away) as records of a fine ancestral past (see page 4). Agreeing with Sir Paul Ruddock that Museums are here to preserve and share knowledge from everyone's artefacts for everyone (see page 5) we can think about how every kind of visitor to the Museum can be considered (see Pages 6 and 7). We have now had three articles on a project designed to prevent exclusion and social injustice (see Page 9). Probably the greatest shift is that all voices are seen as equally valid and notable. We would like to include more voices from the Membership. Please contact me with any ideas for an article or how we can improve the Magazine. In the meantime wishing everyone a happy holiday period!

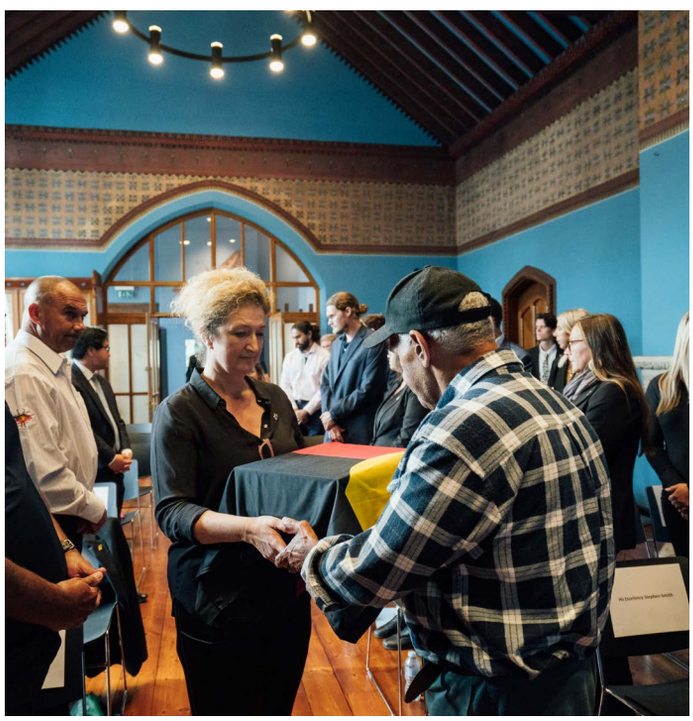
Dawn Osborne, *Editor*

From the Director

Photo: © PRM

Towards the return of what should never have been taken

As successive museums in the United States and Australia announce changes to their collection management and display of ancestral remains (including children and foetuses), the world becomes more cognisant of the scale of the grave injustices that were committed to Indigenous Peoples in the not-so-distant past by the colonisers of their land. They first took away peoples' land rights, their sovereignty and the right to all resources on that land. Often, they then shipped off large numbers of the bones, particularly of black and North American ancestors (but not of white settlers), to museums and Universities, where they still remain.



Pitt Rivers Museum Head of Collections, Marina de Alarcon, hands over ancestral remains to Uncle Jimmy Smith of the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council at the 2023 First Nations repatriation ceremony © Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford

Over the last decade, the heritage sector, and particularly museums, have tried to develop a language to describe how we 'keep', 'care for', or 'steward' these collections. The communities from which they originate mostly just want us to send their ancestors home. Two years ago, we published on the PRM website details of the many human remains still in our care. We are now working actively with communities on their repatriation.

The slowness and bureaucracy of the repatriation process can be frustrating and requires seemingly endless patience, despite the efforts of Museum staff. In November 2017, for example, a request came from Australia just after we had just repatriated Maori and Moriori taonga to New Zealand. That request had taken close to 15 years, and we were convinced things would be different this time. And they were, but it has still taken six years (of which two were due to Covid).

It is a great relief to us that all ancestral remains from the Australian continent (except Tasmania) held in the PRM are now back home. Everyone involved at the PRM is grateful that Aboriginal communities, supported by the Australian government, have welcomed our being part of this process. I am nevertheless conscious that we have to complete the return of human remains to Tasmania before we turn to other ancestral remains from across the world.

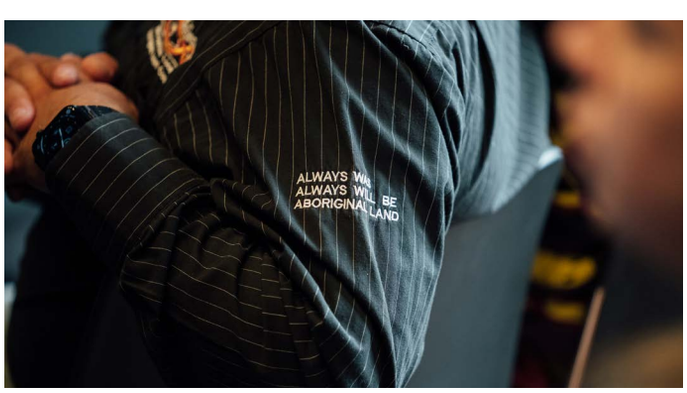
This time last year, PRM Head of Collections Marina de Alarcón, White House representatives and I were in meetings with Native American tribal elders in San Diego, Oklahoma and Arizona. Their repeated message was: when will you please let us bring our ancestors home, they are crying out to be brought home. We are now working with the White House and other international partners to try to make this happen.

We are also working with Shuar in Ecuador, whose ancestors made tsantsa, or shrunken heads, and now have an MoU with the five largest Shuar Federations representing over 180,000 Shuar on how best we can take care of the tsantsa.

We are also working with a team of Naga on returning their ancestral remains from the PRM. Naga elders feel that the bones are restless and that makes us restless too. I have recently returned from a workshop in Melbourne between Naga representatives and Aboriginal representatives so that the former could learn from the latter's experiences on how best to repatriate ancestral remains from museums.

I hope that we too will learn from our experience so that we can streamline requests from communities who want their ancestors returned. I also hope we can work toward setting up common systems across the UK and European Union enabling all ancestral remains to be returned in ways that are less bureaucratic and less colonial in their power imbalances than now. We want to undo harm rather than cause it and help to return what should have never been taken: the ancestral remains of ancestors or, as they say in Australia, 'our old people'

Laura Van Broekhoven, *Director*



Photos: © PRM

A participant at the 2023 First Nations repatriation ceremony

Collaborating with the past: Native American Portraiture by Shane Balkowitsch

Shane Balkowitsch has set out to create one thousand portraits of Native American people using an historical wet plate photographic process, collaborating closely with each sitter on their photographs. This is the first UK exhibition of his work at the PRM. The images on display have been selected from a recent acquisition by the Pitt Rivers Museum of forty original plates.

Many of the participants are from the Lakota community of North Dakota, with whom Balkowitsch has a close connection. Another community that Balkowitsch has worked with closely is that of the Three Affiliated Tribes (Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara) of North Dakota. To mark this relationship, in 2018 Balkowitsch was bestowed the name Maa'ishda tehxixi Agu'ashi (Hidatsa) – the 'Shadow Catcher' – by Calvin Grinnell (Running Elk).

Ambrotype photographs are unique objects: there is no negative, or rather, instead, the photograph is made by exposing an image through the camera onto a glass plate prepared with light-sensitive chemicals. The resulting negative, when viewed by reflected light against a black background, appears as a positive: the clear areas look black, and the exposed areas appear relatively light.

This is called wet plate photography, since the light-sensitive chemicals are poured onto the glass plate shortly before being used. The resulting photograph was also called an ambrotype ('imperishable picture'), and was popular from the mid 1850s until the 1870s, when it was gradually superseded by less cumbersome processes. This was the method used to make many of the first portraits of Native American people, at a time when it was assumed that they would not survive the aggressive expansion of settler states. Portraits were taken by professional photographers in their studios when tribal delegations came to sign treaties in Washington DC, in the winter of 1857. Most of the treaties they signed ceded territory to the US Government. The Yankton Treaty for instance, signed in April 1858 between the United States government and the Yankton Sioux (Nakota), ceded most of eastern South Dakota to the United States government, and created a small reservation for native people.

Whilst many people view such images today as coming from a time of violent settler expansion and when racist views about the native population held sway, this exhibition and the voices of those Native Americans who have worked with Balkowitsch give another perspective on this visual history, one that sees them also as treasured images of ancestors who show their dignity and courage in the face of terrible circumstances. It is this understanding of the importance of these valued historical images that each person brings with them to Balkowitsch's studio, as they collaborate with the past to create a new portrait.

Otakwan Acahkos Iskwiw, 2019

Ira Lawrence High Elk, 2020

Richard Orville Grey Day, 2017

As Margaret Yellowbird-Landin, one of Balkowitsch's partners in this work, says:

'These images show that we are a people that could not be erased from this earth. They are for our future generations to see we are still here, we are strong, we are humble, we are pitiful, we are honored, we are grateful, we are indigenous, we are unified.'

'I wanted my portrait taken for the overall experience in general of how it was done back then. It was a super cool opportunity with an amazing outcome. I also do believe there is a connection between my photograph and the historical ones, being that it followed the same procedure to capture an image that would ultimately go down in history, which I believe is a great honor that I'm thankful to have been a part of and have been selected for.'Ira High Elk (Scares the Eagle Lakota nation)

Christopher Morton, *Deputy Director and Head of Curatorial, Research and Teaching at the Pitt Rivers Museum*

(Above) Dakota Goodhouse (Two Wars) and daughter April Shooting Star Lee, 2017

(Left) Gloria and Floris White Bull

Photos: © Shane Balkowitsch

Why Museums: Sir Paul Ruddock's Beatrice Blackwood Lecture, September 29th, 2023

Royal game of Ur, 2600-2400 BCE; wood and shell; Ur, Iraq (British Museum)

This year's lecture in memory of Beatrice Blackwood, the remarkable anthropologist, was the last of the series to be organised by the Friends of the PRM (now Members). It was given by Sir Paul Ruddock, whose background and expertise made him exceptionally appropriate as a speaker at this historic moment in the history of museums. Sir Paul is a trustee of the British Museum and of the Metropolitan Museum, New York, and has previously served as a trustee of the Victoria and Albert and supporter of the Courtauld Institute of Art.

The following text is an edited version of the concluding section of Sir Paul's talk. The full text can be accessed at: www.prm.ox.ac.uk/beatrice-blackwood-lecture-2023-why-museums

"Museums are unique. They are educational institutions, research institutions, tourist attractions. They are guardians of the achievements and lives of hundreds of generations of humans before us. They let us marvel at the ingenuity, creativity and sheer skill of societies that lived 100 years, 1000 years, 5000 years or a million years ago. They remind us we are not by any means the most skilled or creative generation in human evolution: they foster intercultural understanding; they stimulate the artists and designers of today and they hold exhibitions that reflect on contemporary society. And they are wondrous places in which to wander and reflect.

Much of what we know about the ancient world would not have occurred without the archaeology of the last 200 years, combined with the curatorial expertise provided by the great encyclopaedic museums and the research they have conducted. They display the deciphering of hieroglyphs and cuneiform, the study of flora and fauna, and share the cultures of the world. Rather than creating division, these institutions show the commonality of human achievements and aspirations as well as their linkage and connections across the globe and across the millennia. They celebrate both the history of humanity as well as the extraordinary artistic and scientific achievements of civilisations throughout history: as trustees of world history, they preserve the evidence for future generations to study and understand. They are places of wonder and indeed of enlightenment: for many they take on a sacred space. In a rapidly changing and increasingly anxious world, they provide a counterbalancing sense of stability to transitory fashions and ideas.

The encyclopaedic museum today is not rooted in nationalism. It seeks to be an educator and a facilitator. It helps us to understand how differing cultures throughout time have tried to make sense of birth and death, peace and war, harvest and famine. It showcases the high points of human achievement since the earliest times whilst also exhibiting the utilitarian and the prosaic. It is a window into the lives, struggles and achievements of our forebears: how different peoples and times have tried to explain their relationship with the world; how we in the 21st century came to be who we are - the first tools; the transition from hunter gatherers to agrarians; the formation of city states; the creation of awe-inspiring buildings and wondrous objects such as the Royal Game of Ur, a board game dated 2,600-2,400 BCE held at the British Museum, illustrated here: five examples were unearthed from the royal cemetery of Ur by Sir Leonard Woolley during his excavations in 1922-1934.

We must acknowledge the history of these collections but we cannot rewrite it. We CAN tell the stories of worldwide humanity if we do so in partnership with the cultures from which those objects derive.

We have been very fortunate that those enlightened minds of the 18th and 19th century sought to preserve and record. Our culture and understanding of our history and other cultures would be so much less informed if the likes of the Reformation Puritans, Mao's cultural revolutionists and the present-day iconoclasts of Isis had succeeded in obliterating all the evidence of our past.

Whenever, throughout history, the world has moved towards tribalism and polarisation it has rarely seen a benevolent outcome. The universal encyclopaedic museum is a counter to this. We must continue to showcase all cultures and be a public square for the debate of contentious issues from which we must not shy away. But we also need to provide balance and not let angry voices at both ends of the political spectrum dominate the agenda. Museums play a vitally important role in society to protect and preserve all our histories. That is why museums remain as relevant today as they ever have been."

Gillian Morriss-Kay, *former Chair of the Friends of the Pitt Rivers Museum*

Uncovering Disability Histories at the PRM

The history of disability is a wide-reaching and yet often underrepresented field of study. Whether it's the study of the evolving nature of physical and mental impairments over time, or the ways in which these impairments have been culturally understood in different times and locations, these are things which we all share some connection with. Yet we rarely seem to capture them within the broad and expansive narratives of a museum display.

Plaster cast of a fragment of the ancient Egyptian Battlefield palette. In the aftermath of a battle, two captives are bound unnaturally contorted by two abstract representations of the King. In Ancient Egytian Art, the King is shown as having the right to maim and disable his enemies. (PRM 1917.53.803)

Today, there are 10.4 million disabled people in England and Wales who identify as disabled. One in four households include at least one disabled member and one in five people will probably be affected by disability during their lifetime. Of all those conditions that comprise of what we consider 'disability' today, over 80% of them are considered to be 'acquired': the result of aging, accident or trauma. How can we bring the voices of disabled people into the museum spaces, and tell the stories of disabled people both past and present?

Such is the challenge set by the *'Curating for Change'* project (an initiative delivered by Screen South and the *'Accentuate'* programme) with which the PRM and the Ashmolean have been working since September 2022. Funded largely by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Arts Council England and the Arts Fund, the project aims to create strong career pathways for d/Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent curators in museums. As one of the programme's Fellows, and with a background as a disabled Egyptologist who specialises in studying disability in antiquity, I set myself the task of demonstrating to the public how experiences of disability have been longstanding in human history, and why that's important for all of us.

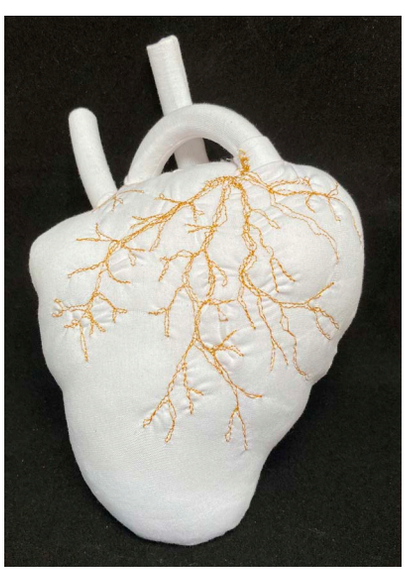
In this regard, the Pitt Rivers Museum presented a rather unique opportunity. Unlike the Ashmolean, which is arranged across a general span of chronology and geography, the Pitt Rivers collection is typographical: all arranged according to the types of objects they are, rather than where or when they came from. No linear story would suit the Pitt Rivers' style and so, instead, I embraced the idea of focusing on the objects themselves, utilising them in order to explore not only what they said about themselves, but also what they could do to help tell us something about our shared connections with disability.

This is a story that could not be done justice with just one voice either: disability is such a diverse and personal experience, different from person-to-person, even amongst those who share the same impairment. Therefore, during the summer of 2023, I led a group of disabled co-producers with connections to Oxford who were interested in joining me on this adventure of discovery. Our questions grew from asking how disabled people lived throughout time, to interrogating how the objects may help us to capture the experiences of disability itself. Our conversations centred around three themes:

1. Form and Function: How has the human body and mind been visualised and understood over time? Where can we see disability in these depictions?

2. Precarity and Violence: How are people made disabled by violence? Who does this, and why?

3. Care: How important is the act of care? What perspective can disability bring to this?



'The Kintsugi Heart': A clothwork art piece created by our co-producer, Juliet. It tells the story of her brother Patrick, who was born with a hole in his heart and needed open-heart surgery at four years old. The experience was traumatic and the valve needed to be replaced forty years later. The second surgery was a success, and he's now living healthily at the age of 56. The gold thread - referencing the Japanese art of Kintsugi - captures the beauty of repair and healing.

All of these questions are profound in each of their own ways, and we never sought to answer them definitively. Merely, we wish to invite the audience to consider each of these things, and reflect on how these experiences affect all of us, and how disabled people might be able to provide a different perspective. Not only on how we think about the past, but our present and possible futures too. To truly begin to understand the scope of what these histories can tell us, we must begin to engage with our most basic of human instincts: empathy.

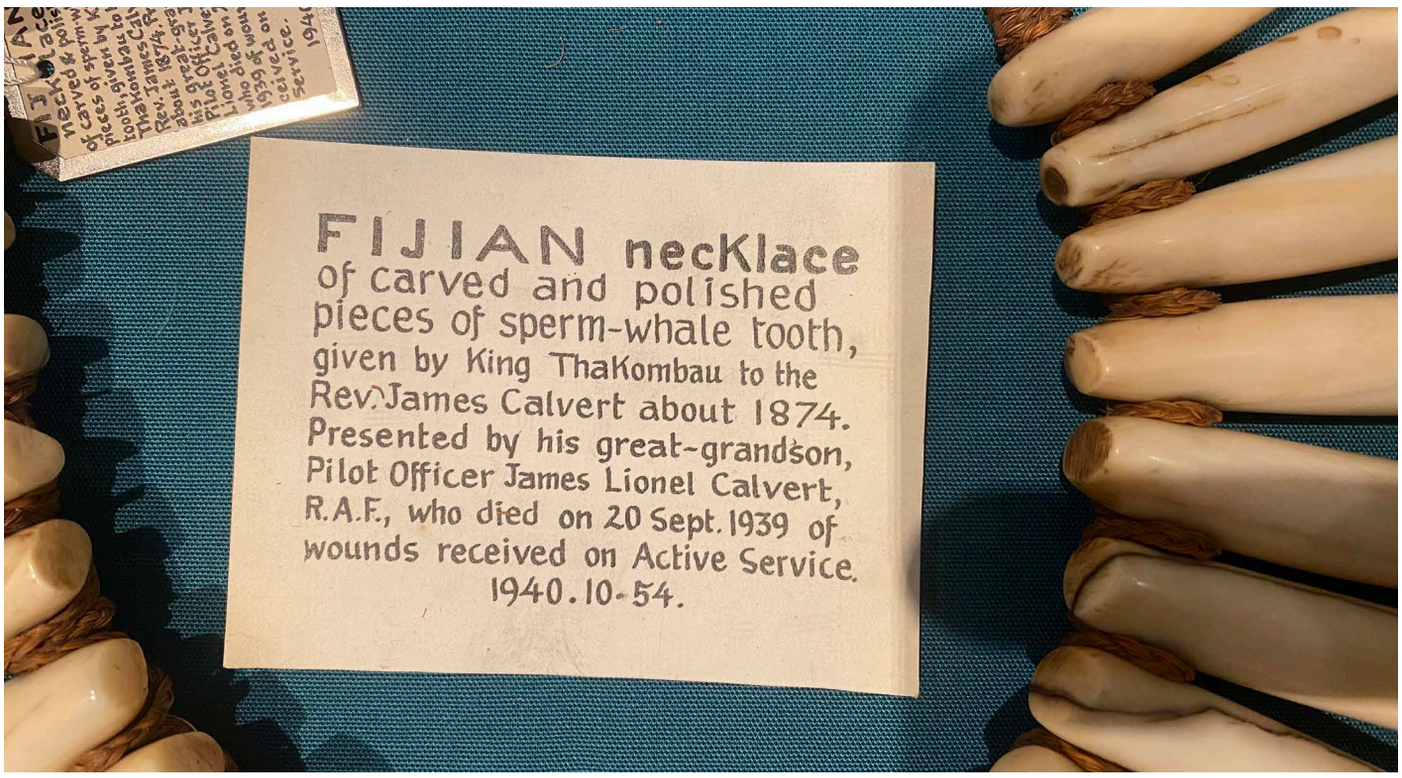
I invite you all to join us on this journey together, and reflect on how these experiences have not only shaped the lives of disabled people, but have a deeper meaning for all of us.

'Nothing Without Us: Experiences of Disability' is a free gallery trail covering all three floors of the Pitt Rivers Museum and has been installed since 16th November 2023.

Kyle Lewis Jordan, *Curating for Change Fellow*

Photos: © PRM

How Dyslexia affects the museum experience



Fijan necklace of carved and polished pieces of sperm-whale tooth, given by King Thakombau to the Rev. James Calvert about 1874. Presented by his great grandson, Pilot Officer James Lionel Calvert, R.A.F., who died 20 September 1939 of wounds received in Active service. 1940.10.54.1. This is an example of a handwritten label at the PRM that the author found easier to read

When you think of the word disability, what do you think of? Is it physical, mental, both, or something completely different? I am part of the 6 million people in the UK who have dyslexia: in fact, it is very probable this number is even greater than this as many people have not received or completed a diagnosis. The British Dyslexia Association's definition of dyslexia is that it is a specific learning difficulty that mainly affects reading and spelling. However, difficulties are wider-ranging than this, often profound and misunderstood.

How does dyslexia influence museums? One of the primary ways of conveying information in museums is through labels, and, what do labels require individuals to do? Read. However, the effects of dyslexia go further than just labels being tricky: the struggle can cause embarrassment, anxiety and shame and make people with dyslexia feel unwelcome, uncomfortable and uneasy in a museum space, perhaps to the point of avoiding museums.

Museums are for many things, and they mean something different from person to person - but broadly, they hold and keep cultural objects and past knowledge and share that with the public, so that the public can, in turn, obtain knowledge and information. The way in which objects are presented and labelled profoundly affects the viewer's perception and understanding, of not only the individual object or display, but also the broader context in which the object originates. Thus, while essential, labels for the dyslexic visitor can prove problematic. This is not to say that museums, with their 3D and visual nature cannot be great learning spaces for dyslexics, but changing slight aspects of portraying information in museums, including labels, would make them an even better amazing resource for the dyslexic population and many others.

For me, reading, particularly anything at length, is cognitively demanding and can lead to exhaustion, lack of focus, confusion and often a breakdown in comprehension. This can happen within a single label. Embarrassment surrounding this difficulty means I often pretend I've finished with a display case or set of labels and move on, to keep pace with other museum goers. On one of my many visits to the Pitt Rivers Museum, I realised I hadn't understood the latter part of a label, because I was skipping over bits unintentionally as I was getting tired and a bit ashamed as I became aware of the people around me and felt bad about taking up space because of my slowness. But, as a result of skipping over, I had to reread the entire label. As I go through an exhibition, the fewer labels I read, not because I'm not interested, but purely due the cognitive energy needed and the impact of being 'tired' or losing focus.

The Pitt Rivers is often referred to as the museum of labels, and seeing the labels, old and new, in the Pitt Rivers is one of the pleasures of the Museum. A massive advantage of the Pitt Rivers is objects are organised by theme rather than time, provenance and so on, which means one can read a label or two in the display and, when I get tired, I can carry on looking at the display and have a good idea about the surrounding items without confusion or feeling obliged to read everything.

Museums, in order to be inclusive, need to consider the potential impact of 'hidden' disabilities. Research shows that larger font size and increased line spacing significantly improve readability for those with reading difficulties including dyslexics, the elderly, visually impaired and non native speakers, without negatively impacting other museum visitors.

Fergus Bertie, *Anthropology graduate, Oxford Brookes University*

Harvest Trophy Workshop in the Conservation Lab

The Museum has a wonderful collection of harvest trophies, some hidden away in drawers and others in storage. The most magnificent one is the large harvest trophy in the glass cabinet somewhat hidden on the ground floor, do seek it out the next time you visit! It was made in 1949 of wheat, oats and barley and is a fantastic example.

Harvest tokens & trophies are known by many different names across the country; 'corn dollies', 'corn mothers', 'corn maidens', 'kirn', 'kern', 'churn', 'mell-doll', 'mare', 'hag', and 'neck' to name but a few. They have a long history rooted in agricultural traditions and folklore in the UK and in many other cultures around the world. These decorative objects are generally made from wheat straw, oats or rye and are typically crafted into various shapes and designs. Often, but not always, they are made from the last handful of cut corn and relate to the celebration of harvest and the completion of the seasonal cycle. They could be made directly in the field or more commonly taken back to the home or farmhouse and kept until the following spring when they would likely be returned to the land and ploughed back into the earth.

Harvest Trophy workshop in the research lab of the Pitt Rivers Museum

Other pagan customs and beliefs associate them with the fertility of crops. In pre-Christian times, people revered corn as a sacred plant that provided sustenance and played a significant role in their livelihoods. They believed that spirits or deities resided in the cornfields and that by creating corn dollies, they could capture these spirits and ensure a bountiful harvest for the following year. Whatever your beliefs, these objects have evolved and adapted over time, with many being assimilated into Christian practices such as harvest festivals.

More recently, the making of harvest trophies and corn dollies became more decorative, complex, and artistic: some are plaited, and some are tied. These elaborately crafted corn dollies are often showcased at agricultural fairs or exhibited in museums as examples of traditional rural crafts.

Corn-dolly made by Mr L.G.Bishop of Conderton, Worcs., near Tewkesbury, Glos. Possibly a survial from former corn figures for luck in harvest. CF. Frazer, Golden Bough, s.v. corn-baby, corn-spirit, etc. d.d. Charles Green, Esq. 1941.9.3

While the practical significance of corn dollies has diminished in modern agriculture, they continue to be made as decorative items and cherished symbols of the harvest season. They also serve as a connection to the cultural heritage and folklore of the past, reminding us of the deep-rooted traditions and beliefs associated with the cultivation of corn. In contemporary art practice they offer a wealth of possibilities for mixed media and conceptual artists as well as providing a deeper understanding of the material itself.

With these connections and customs associated with harvest trophies and corn dollies, the workshop in the conservation lab used the Museum's collection as a cultural and historical context, next to the teaching samples bought in by the tutor. This allowed for discussions around customs, folklore and beliefs connected to harvest.

Participants came from a variety of places and background interests, from artists to jewellers and those with a desire to practice traditional crafts using sustainable materials. The day also allowed the opportunity to learn about heritage wheat and the changes to farming practices which currently affect the viability of the craft as well as how to how to prepare and grade the straw. The conservation lab was a wonderful setting to look at these objects in more detail, enabling much discussion on differences in materials, techniques, and methods of working. There was plenty of opportunity to gain experience with both basic and more complex plait patterns and straw forms with those joining us making a variety of their own plaits, trophies, and tokens to take away.

Penny Maltby, *Artist/straw worker at The Ministry of Straw*

Photos: © Penny Maltby

Activating the Archive: Ogongulo

'Activating the Archive: African environmental histories and knowledges materialised in museum collections' was a year-long project funded by a joint Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and Natural and Environmental Research Council (NERC) grant to research the "Hidden histories of environmental science: Acknowledging legacies of race, social injustice and exclusion to inform the future". It was led by Dr. Ashley Coutu (PRM), Dr. Chris Morton (PRM) and Dr. Tabitha Kabora (University of York).

In our third instalment of our Activating the Archive project update, we thought it might be interesting to take a closer look at an object and a photo that our team researched together.

One of the major geographical areas the group focused on was around Lake Nyanza (Victoria), Kenya. This was partly because the PRM holds object and photo collections from this area and that some of our team - Stephen Rucina and Veronica Muiruri, National Museums of Kenya - had relevant expertise, having done research into plants and lake shore levels in the past 10,000 years in the region. By using objects and photos, it also meant that that we could think about the environment in terms of how people used and collected different types of materials from the lake and its shore and think about how this changed over time.

One of the most interesting objects that we looked at together was this set of snail and bivalve shell necklaces, or *'ogongulo'*, in the Luo language. Kenyan archaeologist Gilbert Oteyo had worked on this object with Chris Morton as part of a Luo histories project in 2007. Gilbert explained the association of this object with Mumboism. Mumboism was a cult movement that became active in the region around 1913, as a reaction to British colonial rule and the growing Christian missionary activity. The cult taught anti-imperial teachings and was thus suppressed by the colonial government. One of the aspects of our project was to understand how colonial policies affected local land use, so this object was immediately interesting to us all, due to its context of being an object of resistance.

Mandahl-Barth, G. 1954. The freshwater mollusks of Uganda and adjacent territories. Ann. Mus. r. Congo belge 8° Zool. 32: 1-206.

1937.34.30.1 Nyanza, Kenya 1936, close-up photo of the perforated snail and bivalve shell necklets worn by Luo men called ogongulo.

1998.349.3.1. A man punting a log raft. The raft is usually made from logs of very light cork-like tree (called orindi in Luo) which grows as a natural shoreline vegetation. This photo is taken at the shoreline of Lake Victoria.

As part of the project, we also wanted to find out more about the shells and how they would have been harvested from the lake, as there are photos in the collection depicting local people harvesting grasses and plant species for making fishing baskets, ropes, and log rafts such as the one depicted below. The shell necklace, however, represents a different type of use of lake shore fauna for an object that had significant spiritual influence, representing the importance and power of the lake, but also physically protecting the wearer by being connecting to the water.

After some research, we identified that the dominant snail shell species of the necklets were made from *'Bellamya'* snails. Interestingly, Lake Nyanza has 6 currently recognised species of *'Bellamya'*, which is the highest number of viviparid species of any African lake, with 5 out of 6 of them being endemic to Lake Nyanza. Although the necklets are mainly made up of the snail shells, there are also a small bone bead and a few bivalve shells, which are the species *'Coelatura hauttecoeuri'.*

A project webpage can be found on the PRM site: https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/activating-archive

Ashley Coutu, *Research Curator (African Archaeology) and Deputy Head of Research at the Pitt Rivers Museum*

Kiln Guardians: Komainu: a very Japanese lion

The entrance to a Shintō shrine is often guarded by two large and superficially very similar mythical lion-like beasts, which are often known interchangeably in Japanese as *'komainu'* or *'shishi'*. Strictly speaking they are not the same: that on the right will be a komainu, and that on the left a shishi.

Komainu (usually pronounced with four syllables kom – ah – een – oo) means Korean dog, or perhaps just foreign dog, while shishi are lions. As a pair they are symbolical guardians placed to ward off harmful people and evil spirits from the building outside of which they are placed. In their current form they both closely resemble and in part originate with the stone Chinese imperial guardian lions called in China *'shizi'*. The imperial Chinese lion is thought to have been introduced to Japan from the middle of the sixth century, again by the vehicle of Buddhist teachings, which brought the lion guardian concept along with other *'karamono'* or 'Chinese things' such as ceramics and tea ceremony. By Japan's Heian period in the tenth century CE, the process of Japanization of Chinese shizi lions along a Japanese pathway was well underway. Not only were the lions developing along different lines, but one of them had become a dog. Superficially the Japanese temple guardians are similar beasts to the Tang Dynasty lions, which feature large open eyes, wide mouths, straight teeth, and manes of interlacing whorls. But in Japan they incorporate other features from different origins. The lion on the left developed an open mouth, while that on the right has a closed mouth. Why is this important? The iconography parallels the muscular, wrestler-like *'Niō'* temple guardians, which were incorporated into Buddhism from Hinduism, and were introduced to Japan in the seventh or eighth centuries.

Bizen-yaki female (single horn, open-mouth) Komainu at the Amatsu Shinto Shrine,

Bizen-yaki male (no horn, closed-mouth) ShiShi at the Amatsu Shinto Shrine, Bizen in Okayama in Okayama Prefecture, Japan

Niō figures feature left and right, open-and closed-mouth forms known as *'Agyō'* and *'Ungyō'*, that signify birth and death, overt power and latent might, the beginning and the end. At Shintō shrines, the Niō are commonly replaced with the shishi-komainu pair which seem to take on some of their symbolism. A second unambiguous distinction that appeared is that the guardian on the right, which is the komaniu lion-dog came to possess a single prominent central horn, which is always absent in the shishi lion. The mythological lion-and-bull motif is traceable at least as far as the Sumerians, where the lion representing the solar principal brings down the bull symbolizing the moon. Paired in combat, the lion and the bull symbolise the forces of the seasons and renewal.

Present-day Komaino and Shishi come in many sizes and forms. The illustrations show a range of Bizen-yaki ceramic komaino ranging from the guardian at the Amatsu Shrine in Bizen, down to votive offerings created by the potter Takuma Takikawa from Bizen. The komainu with the raised paw are an unusual hybrid of the shishi-komaino form with the luck-bringing *'maneki-neko'* ('beckoning cat') figurine, which itself harks back to the eighteenth century, and is more commonly seen in the battery-powered, plastic, hand-waving form designed to bring luck to small-business owners. The evolution of the Japanese lion-dog isn't over yet.

Dr Robin Wilson, *Director of the Oxford University Kilns at Wytham Woods, a member of Keble and Harris-Manchester Colleges and an Associate Researcher of the Department of Archaeology at Oxford.*

Bizen-Yaki Komainu Birukappu and Guinomi designed by Takuma Takikawa and press moulded/fired by Robin Wilson at Oxford University kilns

Borneo Boat Lutes

Zariq Rosita Hanif and Gindung Mc Feddy Simon performing on the balcony, May 2023

In May 2023 the Pitt Rivers Museum welcomed three representatives from Borneo Boat Lute Revival, a collective of artists, musicians, cultural practitioners and researchers, as part of our shared research project *'The Archived is Alive!'*. With funding from the British Council's *'Connections Through Culture'* grant, which supports creative exchanges and collaborations between the UK and South East Asia, the project team travelled to the Museum to engage with boat lutes in the collection and share indigenous knowledge and perspectives.

Boat lutes are a family of plucked string instruments which have traditionally been played by indigenous communities across the island of Borneo. They are generally carved from one piece of wood and have a long, rounded, hollow body, that looks similar to a boat, from which they possibly take their collective name. Found in the Malaysian states of Sarawak and Sabah, and in Brunei and Indonesian Kalimantan, instruments include the well-known Sape', the Sundatang, the Tapi' and the Belikan. While some boat lutes have been adapted into modern instruments used in contemporary music, others are becoming increasingly endangered. Borneo Boat Lute Revival's mission is to tell the stories of these instruments and their traditional custodians, and to preserve and develop endangered practices to share with current and future generations.

In the Bornean collections of the Pitt Rivers Museum there are four musical instruments that can be classed as boat lutes. Three of these are Sape' (also called Sapeh/Sampe), developed by Kenyah and Kayan communities in Sarawak and Kalimantan, and now a symbol of indigenous cultural identity across Borneo. Older versions of the Sape'

Fig 1: Sampe'Bali made by Kayan people of the Baram region, Sarawak (1906.66.30)

have two strings of rattan and three scalloped frets carved into the neck, with the headstock and tuning pegs often depicting animal heads or anthropomorphic figures. This example (fig.1), originally mislabelled as a Tapih, is thought to be a Sampe' Bali, traditionally used in spiritual healing ceremonies. Over time the Sape' has evolved to have more strings and frets and to be used for a variety of musical and ceremonial purposes. Modern examples often have between four and six strings, usually of metal or fishing wire, with moveable rattan frets that are held in place with sopinit, the wax of the kelulut or stingless bee. Another example in the Pitt Rivers collection, made in 1959, has three wire strings and six small frets still held in place with the black wax.

The project team comprised lead curator and long-term Borneo resident Catriona Maddocks, Malaysian illustrator Zariq Rosita Hanif, and Gindung Mc Feddy Simon, a cultural practitioner, musician and instrument-maker who is leading the revival of the Sundatang lute in Sabah. During their visit, they also viewed a wider selection of musical instruments and other objects from across Borneo, providing valuable insights from their own knowledge and research and from their work with community collaborators. This information will be added to the Museum database along with updated descriptions and local language terms, following the Museum's commitment to forefront indigenous knowledge and experience.

The visit ended with a public sharing session on the Museum balcony about the work of Borneo Boat Lute Revival along with a performance from Gindung and Zariq on the Sundatang and Sape'. Gindung, who is also the founder of contemporary ethno-fusion band Tuni Sundatang, was able to showcase the Sundatang he built after carrying out research into the endangered instrument and its traditional techniques of making and playing, and visiting elders and rural communities to document the practice. It is now hoped the team will share information, photographs and videos of the Museum collections with communities and collaborators across Borneo, and that we can continue a meaningful exchange to accurately document items in the collection and support the revival efforts of these wonderful instruments.

Joanna Cole, *Assistant Curator*

(with thanks to Catriona Maddocks, Gindung Mc Feddy Simon & Zariq Rosita Hanif)

Pitt Rivers Museum Winter 2024

INFORMATION SHEET

The Members' Magazine is published three times a year

INFORMATION

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

Magazine

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Membership

Membership: 01865 613000 membership@ prm.ox.ac.uk
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, Members' Magazine posted to you three times a year, Friends' lecture series.

MUSEUM DIARY DATES

We look forward to welcoming you to the galleries, exhibitions and events.

Exhibitions and case displays

Display case C.95.A (Ground floor case)
Until - April 2024
Na Mele o Hula Kahiko
Hula and the Ahupua'a

Image: © PRM

Na Mele o Hula Kahiko. Quilted by Yoshimi Suzuki. Designed by John Serrao co-founder of Poakalani

This display aims to move away from the often commercialised Touristic depiction of Hula and recentre and recontextulise Hula Kahiko (Ancient Hula) within the Hawaiian Landscape and eco system, specifically the Ahupua'a. The Ahupua'a is a traditional Hawaiian Land Division that runs from the mountain tops to the sea embracing the ecosystems within.

Museum Trail
Nothing Without Us: Experiences of Disability

Photo: © PRM

Metal and Plastic. Italy. Made before 1918. Donated to the Pitt Rivers Museum in 1918. PRM 1918.25.64

In the summer of 2023, the Museum's Curating for Change Fellow, Kyle Lewis Jordan, led a group of co-producers in researching disability across multiple times and spaces. *'Nothing Without Us'* is a co-produced gallery trail that shares the lived experiences of disabled people, their stories revealed by objects in the Pitt Rivers Museum. We invite you to reflect on how such experiences have not only shaped their lives, but have a deeper connection and meaning that matters for all of us.

MEMBERS' DIARY DATES

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

2024
Wednesday 14 February 6pm
Film: Evenki Reconciliation Ritual
Join artist Anya Gleizer and curator Faye Belsey for a screening of the Evenki Reconciliation Ritual which took place at the Pitt Rivers Museum in October 2022 during the artist residencey of Evenki knowledge holder Galina Veretnova. Anya and Faye will speak more about the project *'Wandering in Other Worlds'.*

Image: © PRM

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

Saturday 9 March 09.45 - 16.15
The Kenneth Kirkwood Day
KK Day talks, since their inception about 24 years ago, have consisted of 4 talks on an overeaching theme with different approaches by 4 eminent speakers, who specialise in their field of interest. Following on from the 2023 topical subject of Migration, looked at both in terms of history and the contemporary scene, this year's subject is Slavery. It will be explored in a similar way in the hope of widening the conversation, and of interest with the Pitt Rivers Museum's historical collections in mind.

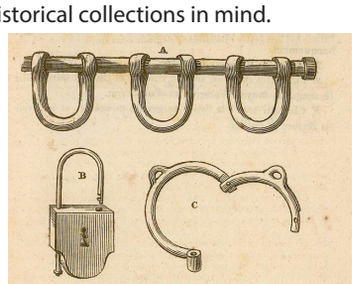

Image: © Faits relatifs a la traite des noir. 1826 Creative Commons

Shackles, Manacles and Padlocks used in the Slave Trade, early 19th century.