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Pitt Rivers Museum

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IN THIS ISSUE

Cover image: Ahu'ula (feathercloak), Hawaiian Islands, c.1841, 1951.10.61. It is on display on the ground floor, in a case that has a curtain covering the glass, which when drawn back reveals the striking yellow, red and black design worked in tiny feathers. Article page 7.

Museum Musings

Photo © Anthony Flemming

Some have suggested that warfare is somewhat understudied by anthropologists, not least because it is a "form of behaviour which particularly horrifies intellectuals" as one anthropologist put it. Others maintain that the cultural impacts of warfare are so obvious they defy any need for anthropological investigation. Both arguments seem cast down from an ivory tower to me. Material culture seems a more reliable access point and the PRM has an enormous collection of the materials of warfare. Pitt Rivers' collection began as one of weapons, likely reflecting his military background, and even now more than 40% of the collection is weaponry of some kind or other. I'm sure many readers have walked the length of the gun cabinets from the preposterous medieval hand canon to the altogether more sinister Uzi 9mm machine pistol (favoured by Arnold Schwarzenegger in one or other of his action films) perhaps grimaced at the endless knives, swords, spears, clubs, blow-pipes etc, or sought sanctuary in the various armours - the armoured cape of fish scales from Sarawak has always been a personal favourite. Like it or not, weaponry embodies the fusion of a culture's technical prowess (in metallurgy, chemistry etc) and artistic creativity – Samurai armour, for example, is undoubtedly beautiful. And, so , it becomes embedded in ceremony and status alongside its immediate purpose. It is also universal, possessed by all cultures and therefore an appealing category of objects for the typological approach to anthropology Pitt-Rivers espoused. Henry Balfour, first curator of the PRM, constructed a pseudo-evolutionary sequence of the development of the composite bow, very much in this vein. Theories of why we wage war range from it being a functional, biological necessity to something more like a psychological pathology. Neither possibility seems very encouraging…..

Anthony Flemming, *Member of the Museum Liaison Committee*

Photo: © PRM

Hand Cannon. Medieval mutually assured destruction? 1884.27.2

Editorial

Photo © Dawn Osborne

As I look across the contents of this issue I am struck by the sense that our Museum is absolutely thriving in a world that seems full of uncertainty and chaos. Just check out Laura's news re bumper attendance figures and projects at the Museum being up for awards on Page 3 and the report of record busting numbers we had at the recent KK Day on Page 5.

Also despite the increase in martial energy and weapons across the world reflected by the subject of Anthony's commentary above, at least at the PRM museum directors, explorers, academics and archivists who sought or are seeking to promote understanding across the world are getting attention (see page 5, 9 and 11). People are finding non violent ways to make their point (see page 4). Page 7 records how cultural objects have been important tools of diplomacy to enhance relations between nations and avoid conflict.

People have always sought answers in times of unrest and change and the divination exhibition article by David Zeitlyn on page 10 records how people have sought comfort through spiritualisation of objects across the ages so they could 'Keep Calm and Carry On'!

We haven't forgotten the next generation and page 8 records how the Museum is reaching out to children to get them interested in the Museum at an early stage.

Contributions to the Magazine are also plentiful and we find ourselves full, a whole issue in hand at the moment with interesting articles and contributions. Not to say you shouldn't contact me if you have ideas for articles or want to write one on a subject about which you are knowledgeable, please do!

Dawn Osborne, *Editor*

From the Museum

At last Spring is upon us and here at the Pitt Rivers Museum we are well into the new year. Half-term, always one of our busiest periods, has come and gone with throngs of children coming, day in and day out, to take part in the events and trails. The new Saturday Activity Corner has been a huge hit and we are now looking to stock some of the wonderful children's titles from different parts of the world in our shop, where you will also find the book of the '*Intrepid Women*' exhibition.

In staff news, we are delighted to have welcomed Jessica Thorley at the start of year as our new Visitor Experience Manager. Jess brings with her substantial experience and joins us from Compton Verney.

As always there is lots going on over the Spring and into Summer and if you haven't yet been on one of our members' exclusive '*Behind the Scenes*' tours (and even if you have!) now is the time to get one in your diary (free for Members) in July. Craft workshops are also back by popular demand!

As the Administrator, I have the privilege of overseeing everything needed to keep the Museum running smoothly and working with those of our staff who create a safe environment for visitors, staff and, of course, the collections. Over the next few months, we will be looking closely at safety and well-being, and I'd be very happy to hear any thoughts or ideas that you may have. Please do just write to me at karrine.sanders@prm.ox.ac.uk.

Finally, to those who are looking forward to warmer and lighter Spring and Summer evenings do look out for some after-hours openings where you can come in and cool down and enjoy the Museum at your leisure.

Thank you for your support and have a wonderful Spring!

Karrine Sanders, *PRM Senior Administrator*

Poster in the shop at the PRM

Image: © PRM

From the Director

I am absolutely thrilled to share with you the important news that the Museum welcomed more visitors in the last 12 months than ever before - an incredible 509,703 people! That's 109,000 more than last year and represents a 110% recovery since the pandemic. I couldn't be prouder of our entire team for managing this so well, and I'd like to give special thanks to our Visitor Experience and What's On Teams for their exceptional work in ensuring that everyone who walks through our doors has such a fantastic experience.

This milestone is part of a much bigger story. Over the 21st century, our visitor numbers have risen steeply - from around 120,000 in 2001 to over half a million today. It's an extraordinary achievement, but it also brings a challenge: ensuring our museum is equipped to handle this incredible growth.

This is why we are working with Wright & Wright Architects to carefully rethink and future-proof the Museum for the next 150 years. To make sure we capture the thoughts, comments and vast expertise of the many stakeholders who love and care for the Museum, we have organised a series of workshops to consult with all our staff, volunteers, guides, friends and members - and, of course, our Board of Visitors. The richness of feedback that we have received has been invaluable, helping us to reflect on, refine, and improve our plans as we shape the Museum's future.

Another bit of good news: the Maasai Living Cultures project was shortlisted for two Awards. First, the University of Oxford VC awards in the 'Making a difference globally' category (very stiff competition there). The other is the Museum+Heritage Awards where we are entered in the 'Partnership of the year' category. The winners will be announced soon, and we are crossing our fingers.

Laura Van Broekhoven, *Director*

What the Seal Revealed

In 1799, following the defeat and killing of Tipu Sultan at the hands of the East India Company in Srirangapatna, India, his palace was looted and most of his renowned library was shipped to England. Whether displayed at the Victoria and Albert Museum or housed in the North wing of the Windsor Castle, Tipu's artifacts, distinguished by the '*babris*' (tiger stripe) motif, consistently elicit calls for repatriation.

My research originally centred on exploring the possible contents of a striking red gauze messenger bag, carefully tucked away in a cabinet labelled 'SEALS' at the Pitt Rivers Museum. On establishing that the letter that was once contained in this bag had been long removed, I diverted my attention to the attached red wax seal that lies curled to its side. Sometime before 1782, Tipu Sultan's fast-moving envoy, on being intercepted must have put up great resistance before surrendering this letter bag. Did the missive contain instructions for their French allies? An alert for a '*qilladar*' (fort keeper)? Or an urgent summoning of reinforcement? Until the day the letter surfaces in an auction house, this incredibly well-preserved wax seal attached to the bag will remain one of the most prized objects of cultural significance to the South Asian sub-continent on display at the Pitt Rivers Museum.

During my research on this wax seal, I traced it to a dark red cornelian stamp which contains the same text and pattern in reverse and is part of the Royal Collection.

Red wax seal affixed to Tipu Sultan's letter bag

Photo: © PRM

The central text in the oval seal is a verse from the Holy Quran, Surah al Dukhan (44:19) which translates to "I have come unto you with manifest authority": The outer text of the seal is in Farsi which translates to: "From conquest and the protection of the Royal Hyder comes my title of Sultan; and the world, as under the sun and moon, is subject to my signet".

Following this lead, which was nothing short of a treasure hunt, unveiled an interesting tale of exiled princes, exit permits, long ocean voyages, and heart-rendering lessons on diplomacy and restitution.

In my continued dedication to creating art in response to objects of South Asian heritage held in Royal collections and western museums, I have created a series of drawings in response to this wax seal. These small resin drawings which commemorate the aftermath of the battle of Srirangapatna. After much deliberation on how and where these stones should be displayed, I decided to create '*Gulkund*' - a necklace designed to be worn in contentious spaces as an act of intervention. In August 2024, I wore this necklace to Powis Castle as I toured the cold halls of the Clive Museum which holds one of the largest collection of treasures looted from Tipu's palace. One may wonder what obscure connection links Mysore to this 13th century medieval fortress. Henrietta Clive, the daughter of the 1st Earl of Powis, was not only the wife of Edward Clive, the governor of Madras (1799) but also the daughter-in-law of Robert Clive, of the Clive in India fame. Her trophy-hunting expedition within less than a year of Tipu's killing helped fill the halls of Powis Castle with some of the most exquisite treasures of Mysore.

Saba Qizilbash, *Artist*

Drawings of objects in Royal Collection, Powis Castle as well as important historic landmarks and buildings that form the narrative of Tipu's defeat in 1799. Graphite on mylar in tinted resin. Varied sizes, largest 4cm x 3 cm. 2023

Gulkund. Resin stones embedded with graphite drawings in customised 18 k gold plated silver bezels. 2024

Photos: © Saba Qizilbash

Sheila Paine: Creating a database of Sheila Paine's textile collection

Members of the Pitt-Rivers Museum and the Oxford Asian Textile Group will be aware of the enormous contribution textile collector and writer Sheila Paine made to the study of embroidered textiles, particularly those from Asia. Throughout much of her life she travelled, often alone, to the remotest places in search of pieces to add to her collection. Her prize-winning travel books set out the details of her many adventures.

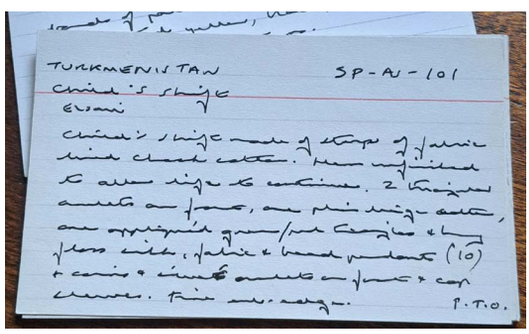
In her later years, Sheila began the task of deciding what to do with her textiles. She wanted the entire collection to be kept together, but that was not to be. Starting in 2008, many of her finest pieces were sold in a series of auctions. Later, in 2017, she also decided to give many of her colour slides to the PRM and the Museum honoured her with an exhibition and the publication of a book of her stunning photographs. She was delighted to find that on the shelf, next to her slides, was the Museum's material from the celebrated traveller Wilfred Thesiger.

But still, the issue of the now dispersed collection of textiles weighed heavily. Sheila was a particularly diligent collector, noting down the precise circumstances under which she had obtained a particular item, including location, date, price and description. All this information was entered onto index cards and stored in half-a-dozen boxes.

Sheila also made a point of sewing into each of her textiles a tiny cotton strip, each marked with an individual code number, indicating the region in which she had collected the item. Each index card in her boxes was marked with one of these codes, so that it would always be possible to find out the background to a particular piece.

Sheila also photographed each piece and marked each photo with the same card index number. Thus from the index number, it became possible to first look up a card index file that gave a description and details of the acquisition of each item, and then, by looking at her computer files, to find a photograph of it.

A typical selection of Sheila's original record cards. These form the basis of the database.



A close-up of some of the record cards in Sheila's handwriting.

Two textiles into which Sheila had sewn a cotton strip marked with a coding that matched with one of the record cards. So anyone with one of these could have found out when and where it was purchased, its usage, age, price and sometimes a lot more information.

None of this, of course, was public, but several years before she died Sheila agreed to let me create a working database of the files and photographs. It was a long and arduous task, not least reading Sheila's sometimes spidery notes. However, I was able to create a series of Excel files, each based on a different grouping – Asian, Middle East, Balkans, Far East, etc. Although crude, this initial database was searchable and linked to the photographs. Later I created a more sophisticated database that efficiently combined all the reference material.

It was at Sheila's funeral in Blewbury that Felicity Wood introduced me to Philip Grover, senior curator at the PRM for photograph collections, and broached the idea with him of passing it on to the Museum. Later I was also in put in touch with Chris Morton, who has responsibility for digital projects and for historic photographs at the PRM.

Many museums have been slow to recognise the importance of digital collections, but I am delighted to say that the PRM staff grasped the opportunity with open hands. Even though Sheila's collection is now scattered amongst collectors and institutions around the world, it lives on in the database that is now available for study at the Museum.

However, there was still one aspect of Sheila's collecting activity and travels which had still not been made secure - the mass of diaries (more than 40 of them) which recorded her experiences as they happened. Some recorded her guided trips to Central Asia, whilst others record her own journeys. The PRM agreed to become the custodian of what I am sure will remain an invaluable resource for museology researchers and those interested in studying Sheila's journeys in more detail.

For now, we should offer our thanks to the PRM staff who saw the potential for the digital materials collected by Sheila and who have now made it available to a wider audience.

Nick Fielding, *Member*

Kenneth Kirkwood Day: Who owns museums?

Photo: © PRM

This year's packed Kenneth Kirkwood Memorial Lecture Day was a resounding testament to the continuing importance of museums.

Indeed, such was the interest in the theme *'Who owns Museum Collections?'* that the event had to be moved to the Oxford Museum of Natural History's main lecture theatre to accommodate the record-breaking numbers.

The speakers, including the Directors of the British Museum, the Ashmolean and the Pitt Rivers, found much common ground, despite representing organisations with very different histories, collections and terms of governance. Their talks referenced the high-profile debates around the Elgin Marbles, the Benin bronzes and the bust of Queen Nefertiti.

Two central threads ran through the day: each case is different; and managing museums in a world that is so markedly changed from the one in which many of the collections were originally assembled, has to be based on respect, partnership and collaboration.

British Museum Director Dr Nicholas Cullinan said his approach was that their collection belonged to everyone. "It offers access to all cultures under one roof and we are held to a high degree of scrutiny." But unlike with some other museums an Act of Parliament prevents the British Museum from simply returning an object in its collection to its place of origin.

"Instead the museum concentrates on being not just a physical building in London but a giant global research organisation with huge international networks."

"We very much understand that people feel passionate about their own patrimony, so we are not showing objects as trophies – we need more international exchange and collaboration."

"There's never a point where there is a fixed right answer to this question – I would rather talk about partnership than ownership. The British Museum must exist for cultural diplomacy."

Dr Xa Sturgis, Director of the Ashmolean Museum, highlighted their recent acquisition of Fra Angelico's 15th century masterpiece 'The Crucifixion', that was saved from being taken abroad by public donations.

"It is relatively easy to raise money for a specific acquisition because people like the idea of museums owning things. But I believe expectations and obligations come with any acquisition. It must be kept and preserved and the knowledge around it shared as widely as possible to provide access and context. It is held for the world and we take this very seriously."

Loans of objects can take place when appropriate, but some pieces are too fragile to transport so retaining them for display in a single location is the better option. "But we need to be open to all ideas and always acknowledge the risks of neo-colonial condescension around that conversation," he said.

Establishing the question of who may have been the original owner of an object in a museum collection is also often complex. "It is self-evident that museums should not keep objects that are stolen. That's straightforward," he said. But in many cases the circumstances surrounding the origins of objects are more nuanced.

Dr Errol Francis, Artistic Director and CEO of Culture&, and Neil Curtis, Head of Museums and Special Collections at Aberdeen University, both drew attention to the contrasting rankings that museums and classical historians make between Egypt and sub-Saharan Africa.

"Egypt was considered 'us'," said Mr Curtis. Meanwhile the rest of Africa is seen as having "a separate (and inferior?) identity," said Dr Francis.

The 19th century practice by British institutions of assembling objects from round the world was often Imperialistic, said Mr Curtis. "Just consider the term 'Near East. Near to what -?". And the value of a museum collection was often an exercise in status-boosting.

"We controlled the collection and decided whose stories were told. There was a culture that 'We are the experts'."

"Today we must acknowledge complexity and listen with humility and move completely away from the language of a dominant power that claims to be the norm. But even that's really difficult, because if we're just doing it to make ourselves feel good that's basically a neo-colonial act. For many people the world is a really scary place at the moment so we have to hang on to some decent ethics and morality."

Professor Laura Van Broekhoven, Director of the Pitt Rivers, said "Ideas around ownership are so different - things have changed hugely in the past 20 years." Where once there was the potential for such dialogue to be combative, today it is a process of healing. Where there was once a presence of empire there is much more connection. People want to see the history and the context of objects they're viewing but museums must also acknowledge that in many communities there is a different way of thinking round ownership. "Some of those objects are considered alive, not just owned. To preserve something (in the way museums do) can feel alien." The communities from where these objects originate want to be included in discussions about where and how those objects should be held in the future.

"We are trying to establish regenerative partnerships, and a lot of work is happening behind the scenes. We're not 'other'. We are all humans and must show humanity."

Nicky Moeran, *Member*

Feather Cloaks

A most curious cloak or mantle

'the King (Kamehameha II) presented the Emperor with a most curious cloak or mantle, made of the richest materials of his islands, the outside of which is feathers of rare birds of highly beautiful colours'
-Birmingham Gazette, 31 May 1822

The Hawaiian feathercloak, or '*ahu'ula*', is a powerful symbol of status, lineage, and political influence in Hawaiian culture. These striking pieces, made from brilliant red, yellow, and black feathers, carry a deep historical and cultural significance. The Pitt Rivers Museum has one example which was gifted in the 1840s by Kekāuluohi, a high-ranking Hawaiian chiefess, to Francis Simpson, the wife of Sir George Simpson. The cloak's journey from the Hawaiian Kingdom to the United Kingdom represents more than a simple exchange of gifts; it tells a broader story of power, diplomacy, and cultural identity.

Traditionally made from the feathers of native honeycreepers, 'ahu'ula' were worn in battle, their vibrant colours serving as both intimidation and a mark of divine protection. Feathers in Hawaiian culture hold a sacred connection to the '*Akua*' (gods). Honeycreepers' high-altitude habitats and ability to soar into the sky associated them with the divine, making feathered garments particularly significant. Cloaks that were won through combat were even more important as they carried the '*mana*' or energy of all the previous wearers. However, by the early 1800s, the now unified Hawaiian Kingdom engaged more with global trade and diplomacy, thus these cloaks became instruments of diplomacy, gifted to esteemed figures as gestures of goodwill and alliance.

Kekāuluohi was a significant figure in Hawaiian history, serving as '*Kuhina Nui*', a role akin to a prime minister, from 1839 to 1845. The position of Kuhina Nui, unique to Hawaiian governance, and was often held by female '*ali'i*' (chiefs) affording them authority equal to that of the king. Kekāuluohi's tenure coincided with a crucial period of political transformation, including the codification of the Hawaiian constitution in 1840.

Unlike in many Eurocentric societies of the time, Hawaiian women wielded considerable power in governance, economy, and social dynamics. Women could have multiple spouses, negotiate political alliances through marriage, and engage in economic trade on their own terms. Hawaiian women, from royalty to commoners ('*maka'āinana*'), played an active role in shaping both their personal and political landscapes. This autonomy and influence are evident in Kekāuluohi's decision to gift the ahu'ula to Simpson, suggesting a strategic move to strengthen diplomatic and trade relations.

Sir George Simpson was the Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company and had travelled to Hawaii in the 1830s to explore trade opportunities. His visit came at a time when Hawaiian sovereignty was under threat from Western powers imposing extraterritorial treaties that undermined local rule. During his stay, Simpson helped Hawaiian leaders, including Kekāuluohi, secure diplomatic recognition from foreign powers by supporting the dispatch of Hawaiian envoys to key nations. For his efforts, Simpson was presented with the ahu'ula by Kekāuluohi, as a gift for his wife Frances Ramsay Simpson. Kekāuluohi's gift is interesting as it illustrates the transition of use of feathercloaks in Hawaiian society.

This ahu'ula is a testament to the complexities of cross-cultural exchanges. The Museum houses three such cloaks, with varying materials that reflect changes over time, including some with silk backings, indicating later modifications. The ahu'ula is far more than ornamental. It embodies centuries of cultural tradition, political strategy, and indigenous resilience. Its gifting by Kekāuluohi highlights the agency of Hawaiian women in political affairs, the significance of material culture in diplomatic relations, and the ongoing relevance of these objects in contemporary discussions on heritage and identity.

Marenka Thompson-Odlum, *Research Curator*

PRM Conservation Team hanging new curtains on the feathercloak display, 2024

Photo: © PRM

Family Activity Corner

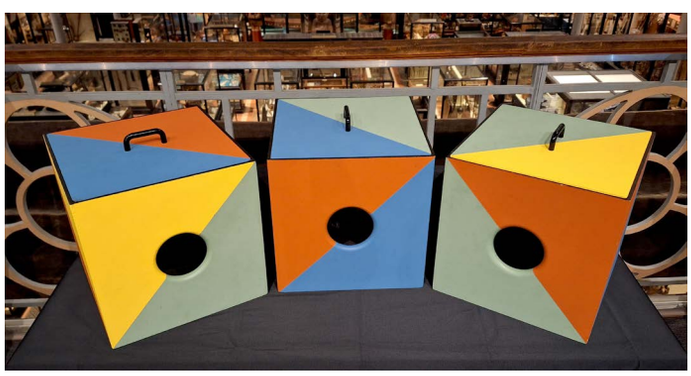
Photo: © GLAM. Photographer Ian Wallman

Family taking part in the pattern making activity using a mirror box.

We wanted to create a welcoming space for children and their families to engage with the Museum through creativity, play and learning, and in November 2024 the '*Family Activity Corner*' was added to the Pitt Rivers Family Programme. This free, drop-in activity includes art and crafts, handling objects, a reading corner and self-guided trails. It takes place every Saturday from 11am-1pm on the Clore Balcony, and is run by our brilliant team of volunteers.

The creation of this activity was a professional development opportunity for myself, and was made possible by the generous financial support of the Kenneth Kirkwood Fund. As the Public Engagement Bookings Officer part of my role is to support the Family Programme, and I have really enjoyed working across Museum and GLAM departments to develop this initiative whilst also covering the Family Learning Officer's role during their parental leave. Thanks go to colleagues in the GLAM Volunteer Service for continued support and guidance; to Exhibitions and Conservation who have upcycled and created new resources; to the Visitor Experience team for providing support to volunteers; and to the Museum Shop team for selecting and selling children's titles from the reading corner. A shout out also to the Bodleian for donating some children's books from their *'Space for Reading'*. This collaboration has generated a real buzz amongst colleagues who ask how visitors are engaging with the Activity Corner.

We know many visitors come to the Museum for creative inspiration. This is reflected in our formal learning programme, with Schools, Colleges and Universities booking regular art visits. Within the Family Programme, we foster creativity, as seen in the development of art activities for the *'Summer Art Challenge'*. I wanted to generate further creative engagement with the Activity Corner, drawing on my own background as a trained artist, and provide opportunities for just having a go and seeing what you can create! Each weekend we offer an art or craft activity, rotating every Saturday so that the offer is slightly different for repeat visitors. This includes art challenge cards and activities inspired by the temporary exhibition, *'Hawai'i: Ma uka to Ma Kai'*. Families can look at Hawaiian quilts on display, then create their own patterns with shapes, colours and mirror boxes. They can also make *'lei'*, a garland made to be worn on the wrist, a technique kindly demonstrated by the Exhibition Research Curator, Dr Marenka Thompson-Odlum.



Mystery Object Boxes, with one of the boxes in use each weekend

Example of pattern making using the Mirror box

Object handling is always popular, and we have incorporated mystery object boxes into the Activity Corner. Visitors have a sense of drama and anticipation as they put their hand in the box to explore the unseen artefact within and, afterwards, we encourage them to find similar objects on display in the Museum. There is also a welcoming reading corner with colourful cushions, giving families space to sit down and explore a range of books centred on art, design, music and stories.

Our success relies on a fantastic volunteer team who run the activity and provide feedback to shape this new initiative. We are already updating resources and experimenting with the timing of the activity as a result. Our coffee mornings bring everyone together to share insights and recount special moments with families.

One volunteer team member shared:

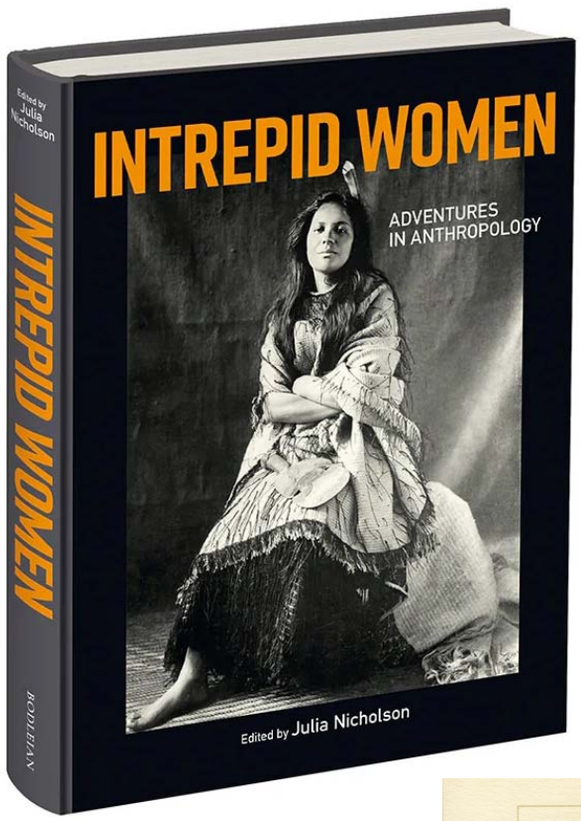
"The thing that has struck me most about the Family Activity Corner is how it prompts both children and their parents to engage with the Museum in an interactive and communal way. We've had a lot of adults pull up a chair to help their kids, try the crafts for themselves, or help another family with the same activity…"

As we near the end of the six-month pilot, what does the future hold for the Family Activity Corner? It has been a huge success, with participant numbers increasing weekly and families keen to stay longer. With 18 sessions between Nov 24 to early Mar 25, over 1,000 visitors have participated. The next phase will see new content development and further volunteer recruitment to help meet popular demand! Children's creativity, imagination and curiosity continues to flourish at the PRM!

Michelle Alcock, *Public Engagement and Programming Bookings Officer*

Photos: © PRM

Intrepid Women



Beatrice Blackwood taking a landscape photograph in Yoho Valley, British Columbia, Canada, in August 1925

Book Launch 7th March 2025 Pitt Rivers Museum: 'Intrepid Women' edited by Julia Nicholson

This engaging book was presented to the Pitt Rivers audience one day before International Women's Day, Laura van Broekhoven, the Museum Director reminded us. After thanking the many people both from the Museum and the Bodleian involved in the production of the book, she praised the tenacity and commitment of the mastermind behind the book, Julia Nicholson, as well as those same qualities exemplified by the six women featured in the book.

Studio portrait of Maria Czaplicka, 1916.

Julia, who has retired after 30 years as a curator of collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum, had organised an exhibition in 2014 to celebrate the centenary of an intrepid female anthropologist Maria Czaplicka who moved from Poland to the UK and was encouraged to undertake a year long expedition to Siberia which was extremely arduous and yet surprisingly well documented. Following on from this, in 2018-19, came an exhibition called *'Intrepid Women'* featuring the six women who star in the book. Laura invited the Head of Publishing at the Bodleian to visit the exhibition which impressed and stimulated him. Fascinated by the objects brought back to the Museum and the detail of the many trials and tribulations suffered by the intrepid explorers, he mentioned that the concept of this book started to develop then, and eventually, here it is in book form, featuring six outstanding early female anthropologists with close associations with the PRM as lecturers and collectors.

Three of the women were commissioned by the Museum to make field collections (Barbara Freire Marreco in New Mexico & Arizona (1910-13), Maria Czaplicka in Siberia (1914-15), and Beatrice Blackwood in North America and Melanesia (1924-38). The other three, (Makareti in New Zealand & Oxford (1926-38), Elsie McDougall in Mexico & Guatemala (1926-40) and Ursula Graham Bower in the Naga Hills (1937-45) donated their own collections to the Museum. All donated objects were well documented, supported by field photos and there were even, in two of the explorers' collections, some early cine films. There was plenty of overlap in their connections with the PRM since four of them studied there.

As Julia explains in her introduction, the accounts of their quite different and individual lives "taken together illustrate and provide insights into the changing nature of the world in the first half of the twentieth century. Despite some of them having advantages of class, money and education, they all had to overcome the disadvantage of being women in a world in which men held the positions of power and influence."

This is a book which cannot fail to fascinate and enthuse would-be travellers and explorers: it showcases the meticulous and methodical ways in which these women recorded their experiences, often mastering the local languages in order to properly engage with the people amongst whom they were living. Their willingness to put up with hardships and setbacks, but to persevere despite many adversities make for an inspirational read.

Shahin Bekhradnia, *Member*

Photos: © PRM

Divination Exhibition

The exhibition *'Oracles Omens & Answers'* co-curated by David Zeitlyn and Michelle Aroney at the: Bodleian Weston Library, Oxford. Dec 2024-April 2025 included several items from the PRM. These were shown alongside many items from the Bodleian's amazing archives as well as loans from the Ashmolean and the History of Science museum, and some from the curators (Mambila spider divination material).

The aim was to show the true universality of the concerns that people have, the big questions that need answering (and always have): why am I or my child ill? Who should I marry? Should I move for a better life? States and powerful questions have similar questions: should we go to war? All unanswerable in the moment. Seemingly unanswerable, that is. Enter the diviner, with skills and access to answers that others do not have. In many forms of divination some form of randomness is important. Examples include bibliomancy (opening a holy text and picking a verse), Tarot and other sorts of cartomancy (shuffling the cards), Yijing and Ifa (throwing coins or chains) or the PRM loan of a basket and the objects within (repeatedly tossed in the air and those that settle on top are then interpreted). But the point is not randomness as statisticians understand it. Rather it is to demonstrate that the diviner cannot influence the result, so the answer is from 'beyond'. Different traditions give radically different accounts of the sources of answers beyond human control.

As a note, the display of the tray containing all the objects from the Zambian basket had to be carefully considered because in the front righthand corner is a small red seed. This is an abrus seed (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abrus_precatorius), not only highly poisonous to touch, but also, even a century after it was collected, it continues to exude a poisonous gas, so is a hazard to curators and anyone who opens the case (thieves beware).

One of the other loans from the PRM concerns the work of Evans Prichard – his book *'Witchcraft Oracles and Magic among the Azande'* (1937/1976) is a starting point for most studies of divination, although the research was undertaken in colonial Africa in the 1920s. On display is Prichard's own copy of the book with interleaved handwritten Zande language texts (only English translations were published) plus one of his photos showing a diviner called Windis using a rubbing board oracle, alongside the actual object shown in the photo! Another (colour) photo shows the poison oracle still being used in the 1970s. This may be fifty years ago, but it was already then fifty years after Prichard's research. (Recent research has documented its continued use this century).

Contents of a diviner's basket mounted inside a glass-topped drawer. 1930.58.43.2

Rubbing board oracle, consisting of a wooden table with a modern replica of the circular upper rubber. 1931.66.36.1

A man (identified as Windis or Zori, a subject of Gami, a commoner Governor) sitting on the ground within a homestead, operating an iwa (rubbing-board) oracle. 1998.34.223.1

In the 17th Century some London based astrologers kept records of their consultations and these have survived. The Bodleian Library archives has record books including names and dates of birth for people seeking answers at the time of Shakespeare and soon after. We know what questions they asked and since, in some cases, there are repeat-consultations, we know what happened next. This means that some historians of astrology can and do take an epidemiological approach. And, a computer game '*Astrologomancer*' has been developed based on these records. This has been included in the exhibition alongside one of the record books on which it is based.

To practice astrology you need good astronomical knowledge (the distinction is a modern one). As my co-curator Michelle Aroney puts it, astrology was the first big data project.

Not all the visitors to the exhibition approved. One comment in the visitors book from 3 Jan 25 was "A place of sin and death" by someone from St Stephen's House. Most other comments in the visitors book were positive, many very positive.

Irrespective of whether the exhibition is engaging and a work of scholarship or the devil's work, the questions we all ask do not change, and the impulse to look for arcane sources of answers remains (the number of people using astrology apps or consulting '*Yijing*' on their phones is huge). It may involve tea leaves, spiders or prayer for divine guidance. Divination in one form or other will outlive us all.

David Zeitlyn, *Professor of Social Anthropology*
University of Oxford

Photos: © PRM

Fernando Henriques: The first Black dean in UK academia: DPhil, Jamaican anthropologist

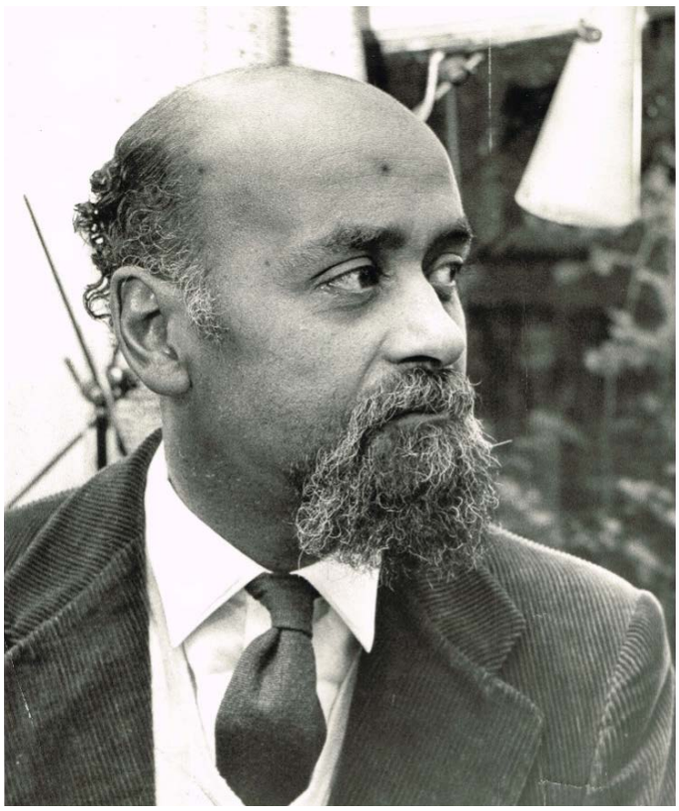


Photo: © Creative Commons

Fernando Henriques,early 1970's Taken by Adrian Henriques

Anthropology is never black and white. It prefers graded statements where nuance is all, over hasty generalisations. Its motto: 'Better by far to be qualified than precipitate'.

Today radical decolonisers wish to rewrite the history of our subject, ensuring productive Black anthropologists get their place in the disciplinary chronicle. Their goal is worthy, but is their aim true?

One problem is that, in radical revision, decolonisers pass over intermediaries who bridged any black/white division by conveying despatches from one side to the other. Fernando Henriques is a dazzling example of these neglected, interstitial types.

Fernando's father dealt in spices and the, then-modish, jippi-jappa hats. In the 1930s he and his wife brought their six children to London, to be educated. Almost all went on to distinguished careers, in law, acting, medicine, social work, and academia.

Come the war, a recruiting officer told Fernando, using a racial slur, that he had no place in the RAF. Instead he joined the London firefighting squads. He studied during downtime, and gained a scholarship to Oxford. Within two years of coming up, he was elected President of the Oxford Union, on his own 'Conservative Anarchist' ticket. According to '*Isis*', the student weekly, he was known for the fluency and wit of his speeches.

On graduating, he chose anthropology as his career: he thought academia a world where promotion was grounded on merit, not colour. Supervised by Meyer Fortes, he wrote a pathbreaking ethnography of Jamaican social hierarchy, with its nuanced interaction of race and class.

He immediately won a lectureship at Leeds, where he gained a national reputation for the work he oversaw on coalmining and other industrial communities in the north of England. This was a time when anthropology promised practical application, and his research was funded by the Department of Industry, the Coal Board, and businesses with multiracial workforces, such as the Bata Shoe Company.

Fernando was considered such a rising star, that in 1960 he was made Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Social Studies at Leeds, the first non-White to ascend to that position within British academia. At much the same time, he shifted from studying industry to sex, and started to participate in public debates about evolving moralities.

His *'Love in action: the sociology of sex'* (1959) was so successful that Panther Books, known for its titillating novels with lurid covers, published it in paperback. It was probably the bestselling work of popular anthropology in the postwar period. He followed it with a three-tome work on prostitution, which was serialised sensationally in *'Reveille'*, a light-entertainment weekly.

At a 1964 conference on sexual ethics, Fernando spoke of Welsh wives entertaining miners on the night shift while their husbands worked the day shift. This caused national outrage, with coalitions of MPs tabling a motion censuring him, and miners daring him to come and speak at their gatherings.

The same year he became the founding Director of the Centre for Multi-Racial Studies at the University of Sussex, with a twin campus in Barbados. Blending academic and policy work, its early years were full of activity and promise. But its funding streams dried up and it was forced to close within six years. Fernando was then appointed Director of Social Sciences for UNESCO, but fell fatally ill before being able to take up his post.

Fernando was of, at least, Portuguese, French, Greek, Haitian, African, and Jewish ancestry. He transcended conventional distinctions between black and white, academic and popular. Practitioners like him make me argue not for a decolonised anthropology, but for a hybrid one, of mixed-parentage.

Let's celebrate diversity. We're anthropologists after all.

Jeremy MacClancy, *Professor Emeritus of Social Anthropology, School of Law and Social Sciences Oxford Brookes University*

Photo: © Open source

Women carrying produce to market, Jamaica, ca.1875-ca.1940

Pitt Rivers Museum Summer 2025

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.
For details of all current & forthcoming events & exhibitions, see www.prm.ox.ac.uk/events
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!
All museum events:
www.prm.ox.ac.uk/events

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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, Members' lecture series.

MUSEUM DIARY DATES

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

Exhibitions and case displays

Photo: © PRM

Hule Nēnē by Manaola

Exhibition case centre court

Discover the beautifully sculptural Hulu Nēnē dress by fashion icon Manaola Yap, a designer and cultural practitioner from Hawai'i, within the Pitt Rivers Museum galleries. Displayed in a case in near the centre of the museum court on the ground floor, this installation is part of the journey through the Hawaiian landscape offered through the Museum's current special exhibition *'Hawaii: Ma uk to Ma kai.'*

Long Gallery - June 2026
Ola i ka wai / Water is life
Dancing the Ahumua'a

Photo: © PRM

A still from the film choreographed by the London School of Hula

The London School of Hula created choreography for the *'Ma uka to Ma Kai'* Exhibition that focuses on the source of life - Water. The dance explores the water cycle, from four perspectives: Ocean, Sky, Earth and Humanity, attempting to embody the essence of and give form to these elements.

MEMBERS' DIARY DATES

2025

Friday 6 & 7 June
10.00 - 16.00 (two day course)
Twined Basketry Workshop
Tickets: £160 (Members £128), includes lunch & refreshments

Photo: © PRM

Small twined baskets

Basket maker Polly Pollock will guide you through this workshop; and you will learn how to start a small twined basket, how to create a simple shape/form by adding stakes, how to work several colour patterns/texture by changing colours and materials, and simple approaches to finishing off.

Tuesday 5 August, 2-3.30pm
Talk by Shane Balkowitsch
Westwood Room, Oxford University Museum of Natural History (first floor)

Photo: © PRM

Two Native American women

The renowned American photographer Shane Balkowitsch will be talking about his career as an Ambrotypist in Bismarck, North Dakota, and his extraordinary project to create 1000 portraits of Native American people using this 170-year-old photographic technique. There will also be an opportunity to view many of Shane's original glass photo photographs which have been donated to the Pitt Rivers Museum, as well as his publications about the project. In 2023-4, Shane's work was highlighted in the exhibition *'Collaborating With The Past'* at the Pitt Rivers Museum.
All welcome. No booking is required.