

The Friends of the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford Magazine



Peru
Fijian Firewalking
Sulawesi
Georgian Silk
Origins of Human Diversity
Reconstructive Archaeology
Poppies

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Sir Philip Pullman



Layla Moran

Cover image: Peru women's Co op weavers.
Photo © Margaret Booth. From article on page 5.

Between Friends: news of patrons

We are proud of our Patrons. They are listed on the back page: six men and two women of high achievement and renown, internationally, nationally and locally. By lending us their names they honour us and raise our public status. Sir Michael Palin, Dame Penelope Lively, Sir Philip Pullman, Professor Sir Barry Cunliffe, Danby Bloch and Sir David Attenborough have been our patrons for many years. The first five provided articles for the special magazine issue that commemorated our 30th Anniversary, and quotations from Sir David Attenborough's earlier tour of the museum were also included. If you still have this Autumn/Winter 2014 issue (in which the Newsletter became a Magazine) it is well worth another look. We gained one more patron in 2017, Alexander Armstrong, who entertained a packed-out lecture theatre with his Beatrice Blackwood event that year.

We are very much looking forward to a talk from Philip Pullman on January 15th.

The second volume of his *Book of Dust* trilogy, *The Secret Commonwealth*, was published on October 3rd, and an adaptation of the first trilogy, *His Dark Materials*, has been televised. I was delighted to read that Philip hates books being advertised as age or gender appropriate; I was riveted by the first trilogy and quoted it in a scientific paper. I love the concept of daemons; clearly, the Friends of the Botanic Garden do too – they were the main funders of the artwork by Julian Warren that was installed in the garden in May.

Until late 2019 we had only one patron under 70 and only one female patron, so FPRM Council decided that it was time for a rebalance. I am therefore delighted to announce that we have a new patron, Layla Moran. Layla is best known to us as the newly re-elected MP for Oxford West and Abingdon (hooray, and congratulations, Layla!). Her multi-ethnic and multi-country background, her interests and her personal qualities are all perfectly matched to the ethos of the Pitt Rivers Museum. Her British father is a European diplomat whose career has included delegations to Jamaica, Ethiopia, Jordan and Yemen, and senior appointments at the Chinese, Asian and Libyan divisions of the European Commission. Hence Layla grew up in Belgium, Greece, Ethiopia, Jamaica and Jordan and has a deep interest in all those cultures. She speaks Arabic, Spanish, French and some Greek. Her mother, a Palestinian Christian, was born in Jerusalem, and Layla describes herself as British-Palestinian. She studied physics at Imperial College, followed by a PGCE and a Master's degree in comparative education; she taught maths and physics at international schools in Brussels and London before becoming a course tutor, then academic manager, for Oxford Study Courses. Her passionate interest in politics was kindled at the family dinner table. In less than 2½ years in parliament she has established herself as a significant voice: she served as Liberal Democrat spokesperson for Education, Science and Young People, and spokesperson for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport; she was also an elected member of the Public Accounts Committee. Layla has a broad internationalist outlook and believes that mutual tolerance and respect for difference is essential for a healthy society. When I invited her to become an FPRM patron she beamed her wonderful smile and said "I'd be delighted! I love the Pitt Rivers!"

Gillian Morriss-Kay, Chair of the Friends



Photo © Studio Edmark



The artwork depicting the daemons in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy; Will's cat daemon and Layra's Pantalaimon (a ferret?) are watched over by the author's raven.

Photo: © GMK

From the Director

We have had a very successful year:

We were a Finalist for the Art Fund Museum of the Year 2019 prize. The judges considered us “awe-inspiring, with an unparalleled collection of anthropology and archaeology that is animated with a curatorial energy sparking curiosity in over 500,000 visitors.” They also noted the museum’s innovative programming and agreed that its bold approach to addressing the contentious histories of its collections was “sector-leading.” They were particularly moved by the team’s knowledge, enthusiasm and dedication to working closely with communities across the world.

In July, the BBC called us “surprisingly trendy” (one for a Pitt Rivers Museum T-shirt?) while the New York Times listed us as the Number 1 thing to do in Oxford, saying “Sure, Oxford has plenty of somber art and artifacts to admire (for those, the Ashmolean is an excellent choice), but don’t skip the peculiar collections of Pitt Rivers, a Victorian-era museum beloved by locals ... inviting you to draw your own conclusions.”

We have also won five other awards and were runner-up for two more: *Multaka-Oxford* – a project to create volunteering opportunities for forced migrants – won Volunteer Team of the Year at the 2019 Museums + Heritage Awards, and the 2019 Collections Trust Award. It was also runner-up for Partnership of the Year Museum and Heritage Awards. The PRM also won Best Family Attraction at the 2019 Muddy Stilettos Awards and two Vice-Chancellor’s Public Engagement with Research (PER) Awards (for Building PER Capacity at the PRM and for the Kwibuka Rwanda project). We were also highly commended for the *Messy Realities* Project.

Behind the scenes, we are setting up a Collections Teaching and Research Centre (CTRC) as part of the Radcliffe Science Library basement’s redevelopment. It is planned that the CTRC will house the PRM’s and Ashmolean’s world-renowned textiles collections and the Textile Research Centre.

Laura van Broekhoven, Director

Museum News



The Pitt Rivers Museum: a Short Guide

Surveying the Naga; A Tradition Continued: Iraqw; Tibetan Objects in Transition; Messy Realities; A variety of Portraits; Kwibuka Rwanda and Ugandan Stories. Some were larger, some smaller, but all were successful: visitor and press feedback has been motivating and enthusiastic.

One needs only to take a quick look at our social media to see how the deeply touching *Lande, the Calais Jungle and Beyond*, in particular, has been. Visitor feedback has been wonderful with phrases such as “Stop-you-in-your-tracks powerful, moving, political, nuanced, beautifully written & curated”. As one visitor wrote on the feedback wall: “this is what museums are for.” (Emily Scott Dearing).

Our plans for 2020 are now almost ready but we, like all ambitious museums, need to raise money in these hard times. We are all involved in grant applications and there are already successes now. An anonymous philanthropic supporter has donated £100K to continue the *Multaka*

The PRM has held numerous special exhibitions in 2019: *Performing Tibetan Identities; Intrepid Women; Lande; Multaka; Traces of the Past; Teaspoons and Trinkets; Ellen Ettlinger; Interaction,*

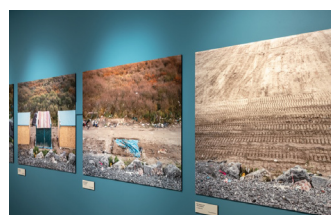
programme and we have also obtained philanthropic support for our musical instruments collections and for our educational programme. We are now fundraising to strengthen our families and education programme and to bring over two Blackfoot artists who will perform when our next special exhibition opens.

Visitors will notice changes in the PRM. *The Pitt Rivers Museum: a Short Guide* is proving popular with visitors - we are very grateful for the Friends’ help with its publication. We have also installed two new donation boxes next to the smart new welcome desk together with the contactless donation station by the main door. To help our visitors appreciate 25 of our most popular objects, new audioguides can be hired (£3 in the shop).

Laura van Broekhoven, Director



Intrepid women



Lande



Tibetan identities

Firewalking in Fiji - Two Different Traditions



Photo © Peter Furian/Alamy.com

Fiji Map

Walking on fire has existed for thousands of years, with records dating back to 1200 BC. Cultures from Greece to China have used firewalking for different rites. Today, its best known manifestation is Fijian.

However, there are two completely distinct firewalking traditions practised in Fiji, one by the native Fijian community, and the other by Indo-Fijians, who are mainly descendants of South Indian indentured labourers. These labourers were brought to Fiji by the British colonial administration at the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth, to work on the sugar plantations. The two traditions are very different in their origins, their ethos and their manifestations.

Fijian firewalking ('vilavilavevo') has its roots in the ancient Fijian religion, which contained a myriad of gods and spirits, some specific to particular parts of the country. The gift of immunity to fire was given by one of the spirit gods to a warrior of the Sawau tribe on the island of Beqa (pronounced 'm'benga'), just south of Viti Levu, Fiji's principal island. Today the island of Beqa remains the repository of the firewalking tradition and that warrior's descendants are the guardians of the rite.

In traditional ceremonies, several males would be chosen for the event from different Beqa villages. All would belong to the family of the 'bete' (the priest/master of ceremonies). Preparation required two weeks of isolation from women and the exclusion of coconuts from the diet – a severe limitation as coconuts are a key ingredient in most South Pacific cooking.

A large circular pit is dug, about a metre deep, and filled with large stones covered with logs. A bonfire is lit some hours before the ceremony and bundles of grass and leaves placed around the pit. An important element is the large tree fern, said to contain the spirit of the spirit god, which is laid across the stones. This is adjusted under instruction from the bete and removed before the firewalkers approach the pit from the direction in which it points. They walk in

single file over the red-hot stones. The bundles of grass and leaves are then thrown over the pit, where they give off clouds of steam in the fiery heat. The walkers re-enter the pit and squat there for a few minutes before walking away unscathed. The atmosphere is generally cheerful and communal.

The Indo-Fijian ceremony is very different. Most of that population is Hindu; firewalking is a religious pooja (a Hindu devotional ritual). Indo-Fijians brought the practice with them from southern India, where it is performed in the pre-monsoon season as a call to the goddess Kali for rain. By contrast, in Fiji Hindu firewalking is an act of purification to thank Kali for help in difficult situations.

Indo-Fijian firewalking is performed once a year in most Fiji temples on a date fixed according to the Hindu calendar and is attended mainly by the Indian community. During the ten days preceding the ceremony the (all male) participants sleep, chant and pray in the temple, eating only bland vegetarian food. Prior to the event, they pierce their faces and bodies with three pronged forks as part of their purification. The occasion is noisy and colourful. Accompanied by loud drumming and chanting from followers, the yellow clad devotees, in a trance-like state, their faces painted bright yellow and red, walk down a long trench of glowing wooden embers. Visitors are welcome but the events are not promoted to tourists.

Indigenous Fijian firewalking, although better known, is now almost exclusively performed at resort hotels. However, the less renowned Indo-Fijian firewalking remains a deeply rooted religious and cultural practice in the country. This may be because the ancient religion from which the Fijian ceremony emanates no longer exists, although there is a very strong tradition of respect for the ancestors. The majority of indigenous Fijians are Christian – nearly three quarters are Methodist. Hinduism, on the other hand, is the religion of 80% of the Indo-Fijian population.

Dorothy Walker, Friend



Firewalking ceremony, Beqa

Photo © Kevin Shafer/Alamy.com

Peru - A culture of knotted string and advanced engineering



Peru women's Co-op weavers

In which empire, stretching across six modern-day countries, did knotted string serve as the primary means of communication? The empire was the Inca's and the Pitt Rivers Museum possesses a fine example of a knotted string 'quipu,' consisting of 240 knotted cotton strings hanging from a long

horizontal cotton cord. We have no idea how to read it, but we do know that the positions of the knots and the colours of the strings enabled Inca quipu makers to record statistical information and perhaps also history and narratives. Further understanding is still 'work in progress' for scholars.

The mystery of the quipus was just one intriguing aspect of the Inca that we learned about on our visit to Southern Peru earlier this year. Although human communities have existed in the Andes since before 3000 BC, the prominence of the Inca was relatively brief. They lived in the Cusco area, 11,000 feet up in the Andes, from the fourteenth century until their subjugation by the conquistadores between 1532 and 1572. Their culture thus lasted for less than 200 years. During that short period they established a civilisation remarkable for the sophistication of its infrastructure, architecture and agriculture, in spite of the fact that they had no writing, no wheels, no strong beasts of burden and no currency, they successfully colonised some of the most mountainous terrain in the world and exhibited impressive civil engineering and agricultural skills. Gold ("sweat of the sun") and silver ("tears of the moon") had decorative value, but no monetary significance. They valued textiles more highly, as do present-day Peruvians.



Moray concentric terraces

Exchange of produce took place among extended families living at different altitudes in the same valley. Typically, the microclimate on the valley floor would support a range of fruits; higher up maize

could be grown, and higher still, potatoes. A varied diet could thus be secured by exchange between people, often related, living at different levels. Terracing not only maximised the area for cultivation on the steep mountainsides and conserved the soil, but facilitated drainage. A dramatic example is at Moray, where concentric circles of terracing

built into a natural bowl are thought to have been used for experimenting with different crops planted at various levels and orientations. Sophisticated irrigation systems, above and below ground, helped to support a population of 10 million.



Ollantaytambo fort and temple complex

The advanced engineering skills of the Inca are demonstrated by a system of roads and bridges extending some 23,000 Km along the Andes, from what are now Columbia and Ecuador in the north to Chile in the south. Their building skills were also highly developed. Creation of the awe-inspiring temple complex at Ollantaytambo was achieved by hewing great slabs of stone from halfway up one mountainside, transporting them across a fast-flowing river, and hauling them up another mountainside to the chosen site. Their skill in mortar-less construction is particularly impressive. At Sacsayhuaman, irregular stones weighing 30 tons were laid with such a close fit that they seem almost continuous.



Wall of the Sacsayhuaman fortress-temple complex

Living in a highly earthquake-prone area, the Inca developed a degree of earthquake-proofing by designing walls slightly inclined inwards. When a serious earthquake occurred in the seventeenth century, the Inca structures fared much better than those built by the Spanish.

Respect for the dead played an important part in Inca culture. In the cold dry atmosphere at high altitude, mummified remains preserve well. They would be brought out on important days to join the family group, be offered food and drink and take part in processions. This attachment to their ancestry struck me as an endearing feature of their way of life.

Clive Booth, Friend

The Origins of Human Diversity

One of the joys of the Pitt Rivers Museum is that every ethnic grouping is represented, but behind this obvious comment lies an interesting anthropological question. If our ancestors all came from Africa some 50,000 years ago (Kya), perhaps 250 generations, probably through Sinai (apart from today's indigenous Australians whose ancestors left about 15 Kya earlier from Ethiopia), how did ethnic differences arise? As a result of genetic, bioinformatic and anthropological research, we now have some answers.

First, note that we are all members of *Homo sapiens* with the same basic anatomy, physiology and such cognitive skills as speaking, learning, and tool-making. The differences are in the details of body shape, pigmentation and adaptations to particular environments. As these are all inherited, the answers lie in genetics.

The evidence for our African origins does not come from the few ancient skeletons so far discovered, but from analysing the DNA from every ethnic group. Key here are mitochondria, the small energy factories in every cell, which carry their own DNA inherited from the original maternal egg not the sperm. Mitochondrial DNA carries group-characteristic mutations, all traceable back to an original 'Mitochondrial Eve' who lived ~230 Kya. Fig. 1 uses this information to show the complicated migration routes.

Other computational techniques show that the migrations across the world depended on a succession of founder groups (each perhaps 1-2 thousand people - Fig. 2) leaving their homes and moving into the unknown. Small groups have particular genetic properties: they have less genetic variety than their parent group (hence, regional groups tend to be similar), the effects of recessive genes are more apparent, new mutations spread more rapidly and selection can be more efficient. This is why change happened so rapidly (on an evolutionary scale).

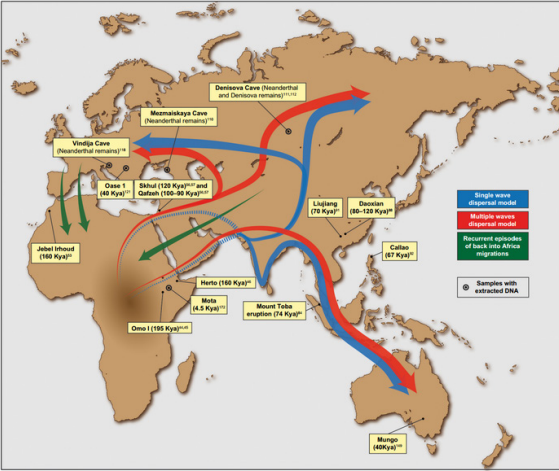


Fig. 1. The migrations of *H. sapiens* from Africa to Australia, Asia and Europe. The blue and green ellipse covers the area occupied by Neanderthals and Denisovans, respectively.

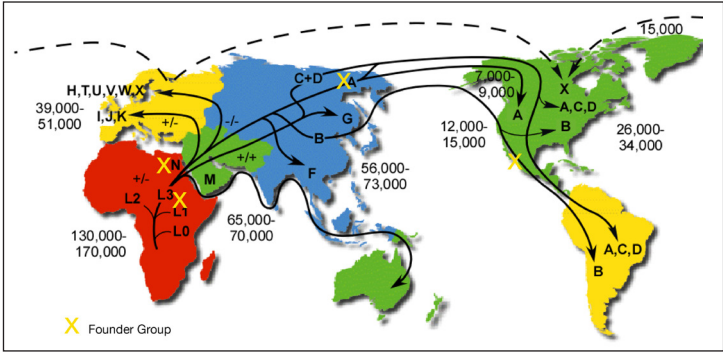


Fig. 2. The migrations of *H. sapiens* showing the key founder groups. Note that this older map shows that the migration to Europe came via the Horn of Africa. This is now known to probably be incorrect.

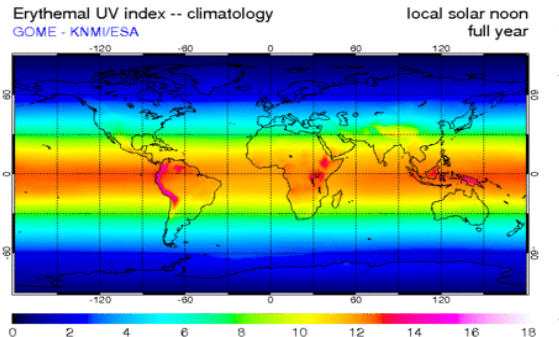


Fig. 3. UV levels throughout the world.

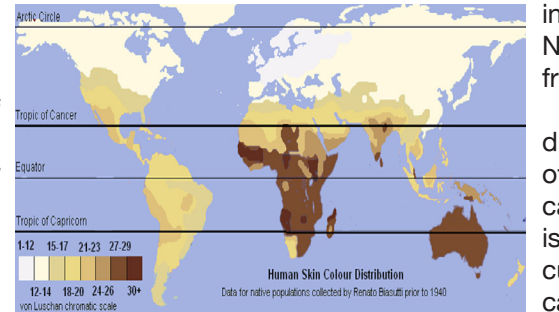


Fig. 3.b Skin pigmentation levels in indigenous populations.

After early humans reached the Levant, they met, bred with and supplanted Neanderthals (Fig. 2), an earlier *Homo* species whose ancestors left Africa ~350 Kya. Those who then migrated further eastwards then met, bred with and supplanted Denisovans whose ancestors had left Africa even earlier. All contemporary humans carry genetic markers inherited from those early *Homo* species. An example is a Denisovan gene variant present in today's Himalayan Tibetans that helps them to survive when oxygen levels are low.

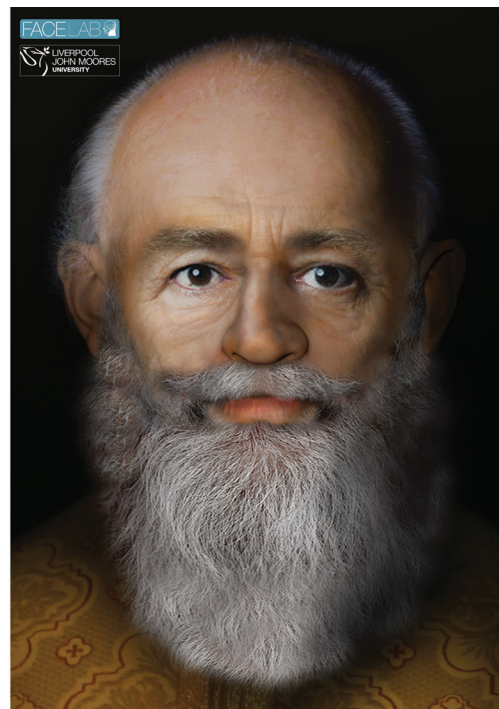
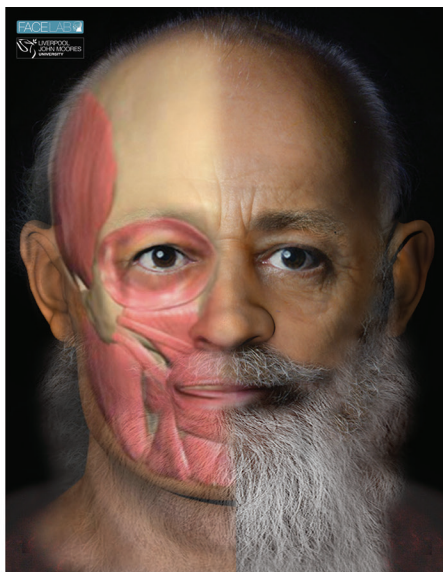
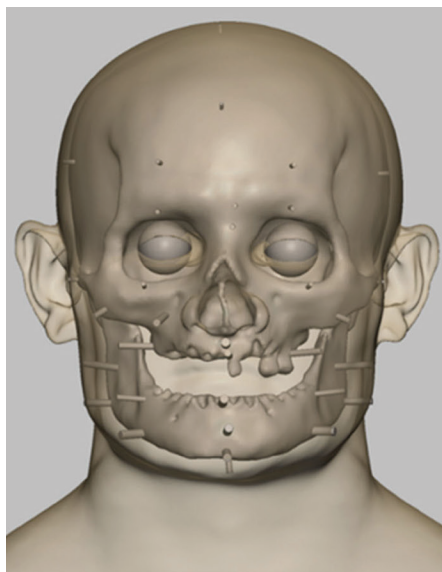
The clearest difference marker today is melanin pigmentation: because of genetic selection, the amount of damage-preventing melanin is higher nearer the equator and at altitude where UV levels are high. One reason why non-Africans are lighter than equatorial Africans is that the group that left Africa ~50 Kya via Sinai probably had skin tone much like contemporary Egyptians, whereas those that reached Australia had more Ethiopian-like ancestors. Some 20 genes regulate pigmentation and can be modulated by mutations, some of which also produce the blue eyes of some northern Europeans. Differences in body and face morphology are still too difficult to explain because the number of genes involved is so large, but change certainly arose through a mix of restricted inheritance, mutations acquired from Neanderthals and Denisovans and from new, local mutations.

Are there any significant differences in the cognitive abilities of different ethnic groups? Here, we can look to the PRM which, uniquely, is organised by themes rather than cultural groups. The evidence in the cases shows that we are all inventive, we all like art and we all make music. That writing was independently created in Africa, Asia (three times) and South America shows that we are all clever. The obvious conclusion? Any differences between us all really are skin-deep.

Jonathan Bard, *Friend*

Reconstructive Archaeology: Challenges in facial depiction of the dead

Image: © courtesy of Face Lab, Liverpool John Moores University.



Legend to figures:

Stages in the facial reconstruction of St. Nicholas of Myra. Creation of a digital image of the skull is followed by the virtual insertion of pegs to indicate thickness of the soft tissues, then application of facial muscles before addition of the skin, hair and eyes.

The human face plays a key role in communication as it conveys information about emotions, age, gender, health, ancestry, diseases, trauma, and identity. The technique of rebuilding a face from a skull is hence informative in both a forensic context, with the hope that an unknown deceased individual can be identified, and in an archaeological context to create a connection with an historic or prehistoric period.

Reconstruction begins by applying anatomical standards, craniometrics and morphological interpretation to the skull in order to create a digital image. Face shape is predicted using average facial soft tissue depth measurements from the relevant population group, while information on eye colour, skin tone and hairstyle is deduced from the historical and archaeological context. Additional information is sometimes available from a portrait, and ancestral DNA is playing an increasingly significant role as the relationship between gene function and facial shape is becoming better understood.

The skulls of some historical figures whose facial appearance was previously known only from portraits have been reconstructed, e.g. those of Johann Sebastian Bach, King Richard III, St Nicholas of Myra, and Robert Burns. The detail of the resulting 3D appearances has even contributed to changing historical perceptions. Thus, for example, Richard III looks like an ordinary man rather than the tyrant depicted by Shakespeare, whose view clearly reflected Tudor propaganda and demonization. The soft-tissue reconstruction of traumatic injuries and diseases affecting the facial bones can even enliven individual histories, e.g. the healed fracture of St Nicholas's nasal bone underlies an asymmetric nose. Unfortunately this doesn't tell us whether it was due to his well-documented Christian persecution and torture or was simply the result of an accident!

Facial reconstruction can also be used to compare ancient with contemporary populations. In the exhibition *The Quest for Ancestral Faces* in Gran Canaria (2018-9), 50 indigenous skulls were reconstructed and shown alongside

photographic portraits of 50 contemporary individuals. In the exhibition 'From Where Do You Hail?' in the Bryggens Museum, Bergen (2017), the facial depictions of three individuals were presented, together with genetic and isotopic information, in the context of migratory patterns within Norway during the 13th century. These exhibitions brought to life ancient migration patterns and complex national heritage.

Where the skin has been preserved, anatomical data, combined with historical records and contemporary head sculptures, not only helps to depict the appearance of a particular individual, but can give a real sense of their lifestyle and character. Perhaps the most frequently depicted ancient figures are preserved bodies, such as Ancient Egyptian mummies, bog bodies and ice mummies. The remains of Grauballe Man, one of Denmark's best-preserved bog bodies (discovered in 1952) showed incredible detail: the facial creases and the shapes of various facial features were all clearly visible. In contrast, shrunken heads such as those of Amazonian warriors (Tsantsa) are particularly challenging as cranial bone removal and chemical treatment has reduced the original size of the head by about 80%. Nevertheless, depiction is still possible because these heads often retain hair and facial features.

Facial reconstruction from human remains, combined with DNA from bones or teeth and advances in understanding the genetics underlying facial features, enables a much more life-like representation of a specific human than is possible from a portrait. Depiction of the dead can sometimes often be controversial and challenging, and cognitive bias must be avoided as much as possible. These depictions bring real individuals of the near and distant past 'to life' in a manner that makes us feel we have actually known them.

Jessica Liu and Caroline Wilkinson,
Face Lab Project Manager and Face Lab Director,
Liverpool John Moores University.

County Council Anthropology: what can anthropology do for local government?

In the Spring/Summer 2019 issue Jeremy MacClancy described the contribution anthropologists make to a difference in the world. Here one of the contributors to his book 'Anthropology and Public Service,' Robert Gregory, writes about how his undergraduate training in anthropology prepared him for his work in local government.

Some 15 years ago, Turkey Producer Bernard Matthews started to recruit EU workers from Portugal to respond to the recruitment challenges throughout his factories across rural Norfolk. Workers were recruited and offered accommodation in the seaside town of Great Yarmouth, drawing on a surplus of redundant bed and breakfasts and ex-holiday lets. The impact on a population that in 2001 was 98.6% white British was immediately noticeable. Different voices and faces were apparent in the town, and there were changes in the physical space and places that were being occupied. Cafes, mini markets and hairdressers soon appeared in derelict shops in the South Yarmouth neighbourhood.

As a Community Worker, having just graduated with my bachelor's degree in Social Anthropology from Manchester, this felt like a clear opportunity. I eagerly approached community leaders to facilitate discussions and meet people so as to better understand the needs they were facing. This led to a number of community-led initiatives to foster community cohesion, including the development of a community association, a newspaper, sports and cultural events. I was eagerly embracing what I felt to be an applied form of anthropology. However, there was a nagging internal conflict: was I attempting to pursue a "value-free" observational endeavour or was I an agent of the state, facilitating the integration of newly arrived migrants into their host society?

Whilst I knew this was not anthropology in any traditional sense, I found myself drawing upon ethnographic tools such as participant observation and the collection of oral histories to drive social good and foster wellbeing in a community setting. I saw myself as a practitioner in local government attempting to apply an anthropological lens to my role.

Indeed, as I've progressed through different roles working for local authorities, I have learnt to apply that lens to a range of settings the public servant has to deal with: stakeholder management; working with politicians; citizen engagement and power dynamics within the organisation. For all of these the appreciation of differing world views, facilitating the voices of the unheard and understanding the "why?" rather than the automation of procedure has been essential. I still refer back to the tools my undergraduate training provided me with.

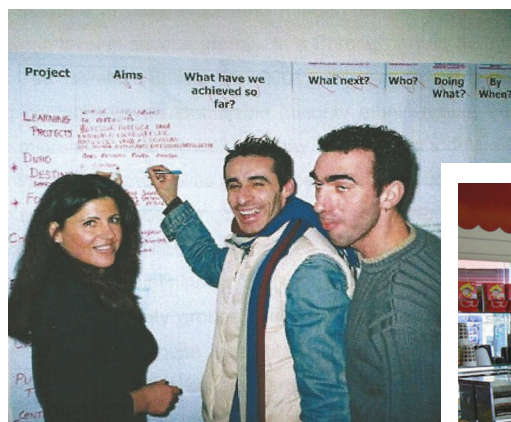
In my current role at Stevenage Borough Council we are preparing a number of heritage-led initiatives which will culminate in a new museum to capture the story of the Britain's first post-war new town, told through the eyes of those early first settlers over 70 years ago. Museums provide a rich setting where many of these tools come into play, but this opportunity for 'backyard anthropology' presents itself in multiple ways.

Local government administration is, however, changing. Ongoing government funding reductions and increasing demands mean that public services continue to be made leaner and more targeted. The rise of digital technologies will continue to see the increase of automation and artificial intelligence to strip out human elements in transactional services, like reporting a missed bin or applying to pay council tax. The roles that will continue to exist in local government will be those that need to facilitate more complex relationships between citizen and state: areas such as youth unemployment, community planning, social care and a growing disengagement from traditional democratic structures. It is here that anthropology brings value.

Back in my home town of Great Yarmouth the established Portuguese-speaking communities continue to play a role in the fabric of social life of the town, a seaside town still suffering from economic decline and social deprivation. For public administrations dealing with whatever comes from Brexit in contexts such as these, the skills of an anthropologist in my view, will remain of huge benefit.

Robert Gregory, Assistant Director - Communities & Neighbourhoods, Stevenage Borough Council

Photo: © Robert Gregory 2010



Founding members of the Portuguese Community Association Herois do Mar.

Portuguese Cafe, Great Yarmouth.
Photo: © Manuel Seixas 2010



Workers waiting for transport to factories.
Great Yarmouth.

Photo: © Manuel Seixas 2010

The Poppy

Photo: © free search



Roman Coin

Fields of scarlet corn poppies feature strongly in the imagination of the British people. It is the colour that makes the poppy so distinctive. Its shade of red is almost unique in the British flora, shared only with three similar poppy species and the scarlet pimpernel. There are also three yellow-flowered poppies in Britain: the yellow horned poppy, the beautiful Welsh poppy and the greater celandine, introduced by the Romans for its orangey-yellow sap used as an ointment for warts. Outside Britain the family includes poppies that grow in the high Arctic and the glorious blue poppies of the Himalayas.

The origin of the corn poppy is obscure: as a species it only occurs in agricultural land, but agriculture did not start until 12,000 years ago. Its closest relatives come from Lebanon, Israel and Syria and the corn poppy is probably of hybrid origin from these. The poppy as a symbol of agriculture dates from the earliest civilisations. Its presence leads to reduced yields in arable fields, but its abundance and distinctive beauty are celebrated, e.g. Roman depictions of Ceres, goddess of agriculture and fertility, show her carrying poppy seed heads alongside wheat sheaves.

Photo: © vintage 142



The Poppy Goddess, Minoan Statue

Today the strongest association of the poppy is with fallen soldiers from the First World War and subsequent wars in Europe. Poppies appeared in huge numbers on the battlefields of Flanders, an association with war that had been noted previously as if “the earth was disclosing her blood”. Wearing poppies for Remembrance started in 1920-21. We think of it as a British association, and it is a curious fact that it was stimulated by a poem, ‘In Flanders Fields,’ by the Canadian John McCrae, championed by an American, Moina Michael, and the first Remembrance poppies were made in France by war widows. In fact, in

France, the symbol became the blue cornflower because French soldiers wore a ‘horizon blue’ uniform, and they, and the cornflower, were known as ‘les Bleuets’.

The poppy symbol works well because of its simplicity. Almost all war memorials are decorated with poppy wreaths on Remembrance Sunday and, often, at other times too. The symbol has been used around the graves of war veterans, on postage stamps, church windows and elsewhere. The most striking was the immense, though transient, installation of 888,246 ceramic poppies around the Tower of London in 2014. Completed by Armistice Day, 11 November, this was entirely removed by the end of November. The poppy symbol has sparked controversy: seen by some as glorifying war. Now we have white poppies from the Peace Pledge Union and purple poppies to commemorate animals that lost their lives, as well as red ones.

Opium comes from the unripe seed heads of poppies, but from a different species with bluish stems and leaves, and flowers that are usually pale violet. Its narcotic and sleep-inducing effects have been celebrated since at least Egyptian times when the seed heads were depicted on statues and figurines. Opium became widely available by the 19th century and was used by numerous literary and powerful people, although many mentions mix up corn and opium poppies. It became responsible for the unedifying ‘opium wars’ with China. Poppies have still more associations: cutting ‘tall poppies’, i.e. successful people, down to size has come into the language and the Cromer region of Norfolk is known as ‘poppy-land’ after a sentimental poem written when Cromer became a fashionable seaside resort. It is truly a plant to celebrate for all these associations as well as its flamboyant beauty.

Dr Andrew Lack, Senior Lecturer in Environmental Biology at Oxford Brookes University



Tower of London Poppy Installation

Photo: © friend of Andrew Lack

Sulawesi: A funeral in Tana Toraja

In the uplands of Tana Toraja on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi, live the Toraja people. Here, art and architecture are much celebrated and their highly decorated, boat-like houses are a remarkable sight. It is also a megalithic culture with menhirs (tall upright stones) erected even now. However, THE thing to see in Tana Toraja, is a funeral, for these are the biggest social events in which huge wealth is invested to assert status as well as reinforce social and familial ties. Everyone is welcome.

Torajans take their time in preparing a funeral. The body is embalmed (with formalin nowadays) and often remains in the family home for months being clothed, talked to and offered food; here, death is not an instantaneous departure. The funeral I attended was in a purpose-built structure, as is the norm, resembling a single storey Elizabethan theatre – a bamboo O, if you will. The ‘stage’ was a large, decorated structure where the coffin rested; to the left a ‘royal box’ consisted of a porticoed reception room where guests were greeted before moving to the stalls forming the remainder of the arena. Most valuable to the Toraja are water buffalo and the status of a funeral can be measured by the number slaughtered – 6 at the funeral I attended was, I gather, a large number – though it can be over 20.

Buffalo had the distinction of being killed and butchered in the arena; other animals were prepared outside. Guests arrived in groups bringing gifts of livestock and other foodstuffs. They were first met by the younger generations of the family, smartly dressed in red and orange with ornamental Kris knives (See PRM Upper Gallery, for similar examples) in their hands. Most guests were taken directly to the reception room, others gathered before the coffin and formed a procession led by the family, joined by musicians playing a recorder-like instrument and a singer*.

So the day proceeded, building to no obvious climax, but with more and more guests arriving and taking their places



Traditional Tongkonan houses in Tana Toraja.



The funeral arena with slaughtered buffalo. The coffin is visible in the structure to the right.



A procession of mourners is led by family members and musicians.



The burial cliff at Lemo. Coffins are inserted perpendicular to the cliff face (square holes). Effigies or Tau Tau (~1m tall) attend in galleries.



The highly decorated front elevation of a Tongkonan house in Tana Toraja, Sulawesi.



Dissociated skulls at Londa and other burial sites are surrounded with cigarettes and other offerings.



Babies are buried in the trunk of a living tree such as this at Kambira.

sitting on the suspended floors of the stalls, taking refreshments. There were occasional tannoy announcements; men were busily butchering the buffalo and a group of children playing with a large beetle tied to a ribbon whooped with delight when it flew leading them all around the arena, while the musicians played a haunting drone and the air was filled with the musk reek of the animals mixed with wood smoke.

After the funeral, higher status burials occur in caves or cliff

faces. Effigies or ‘tau-tau’ are made representing the dead and offerings of food, money, cigarettes, etc are left even for old, dissociated skulls littering the burial sites. In the regular ‘ma’neme’ ceremony bodies are exhumed, dressed and addressed in the belief, again, that they retain some agency in the world of the living, before being laid to rest once again. One poignant custom is reserved for the burial of the very young who are sealed into the trunk of a living tree – the shortened life being continued through that of the tree. As the PRM records, many past cultures had highly developed funerary customs. What were such cultures like? Were they a gloomy bunch? Life is for the living, after all, which seems at odds with a culture of which the dead are so much a part. I’m sure the Toraja mourn lost loved ones as much as anyone, but their blurred boundary of life and death and the centrality of this idea in their culture seemed to be a source of comfort and optimism, rather than gloom.

*A recording can be heard online at: <https://youtu.be/O1vnhlvT-dU>

Dr Anthony Flemming,
Friend

Georgian State Silk Museum: Cocoons and the Caucasus

The State Silk Museum of Georgia is the only surviving component of the Caucasian Sericulture Station, which once formed a grand complex of 23 buildings encircling Tbilisi's historical Mushtaid Garden. With its core exhibition virtually unchanged since its establishment in the late nineteenth century - arranged systematically in elegant wooden display cases and domed glass jars - a visit to the museum feels like stepping back in time.

The history of the Caucasus - at the crossroads between Europe and Asia - has long been interwoven with silk with trade and production in the region reaching back many hundreds of years. Led by the eminent scientist Nikolai Shavrov, the Sericulture Station was an ambitious project of the Russian Empire intended to re-energise the silk sector. With experimental laboratories, training courses, silkworm breeding houses, a mulberry tree nursery (their leaves being the sole diet of the silkworm), and the museum itself, it rapidly became a global hub for sericultural innovation.

Aimed at educating the public, the museum is designed to fully showcase silk making; from silkworm biology through to spinning, dyeing and weaving. Conceived by the Polish architect Aleksander Szymkiewicz, the eclectic building fuses Classical, Gothic and Islamic design, along with quirky elements including friezes of silk moths and mulberry leaves atop pilasters. Today - sadly - the unkempt garden, heavily crumbling plasterwork, and infrequent echo of visitors' footsteps passing through its low lit corridors, reveal its neglect. However, its sense of faded grandeur is undeniably captivating.

The museum houses around 40,000 artefacts from 50 different countries. Upstairs, one half of the main exhibition room is dedicated to silk cultivation, with an extensive collection of cocoons from across Asia and Europe, and specimens illustrating the silkworm lifecycle. The other half displays textiles and objects associated with their production, including spindles and looms. A free-standing cabinet shows vibrantly coloured twists of silk alongside jars of plant and mineral based dyes. Another contains



The eclectic building - fusing Classical, Gothic and Islamic design



Cabinet of plant and mineral based dyes



Jar of cocoons

exquisite flowers hand-crafted from cocoons by staff from the museum, and mementos from the 1900 Paris Exposition.

The adjacent room pays homage to the mulberry tree (*Morus sp.*). During the Soviet period the Caucasian Sericulture station promoted the development of mulberry studies as a branch of botanical science in Georgia, with researchers assigned to experiments in developing new horticultural varieties and tackling pests and diseases. On show are tools for harvesting and processing mulberry leaves, ethnographic artefacts such as musical instruments made from mulberry wood, large cross-sections of 100-year-old trees collected by Shavrov, and a wall hung with framed herbarium specimens. The crowning piece is an entire unbroken mulberry tree root system, which stretches 4.5m from ceiling to floor. Although economic botany exhibits like this were fairly common during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, few have survived, making this room a rare gem.

A stately technical library holds books on sericulture, textiles, and biological sciences; as well as historical examples of periodicals on silk and an illustration of silk production from China, drawn on rice paper. Downstairs a magnificent (albeit extraneous) collection of shells is on display, along with an illuminated tank of corals. Outside the museum the mulberry motif is repeated, with numerous varieties of *Morus* planted throughout its grounds and in the neighbouring Mushtaid Garden.

Although under-visited, in need of conservation, and seemingly frozen in time, the museum is distinctly enchanting and remains relevant to local Georgians. With silk officially recognised as part of its intangible heritage in 2018, its significance to Georgia has proved to be enduring. Meanwhile, there have been several arts and regeneration projects associated with the museum in recent years. Let's hope this lesser-known Tbilisi treasure regains the wider appreciation it deserves.

Harriet Gendall,

PhD student in Ethnobotany at the University of Kent

New members: Edward Bliss, Tackley; Thomas Dobson, a student at Oxford Brookes University; Sir Clive Booth and Lady Margaret Booth, Oxford; Dr. David Faber, Oxford; Ann Warrington, Oxford.

To learn more about the benefits of becoming a Friend, or if your details change, please contact the membership secretary **Rosemary King** at: rhking17@gmail.com or **01367 242433**

INFORMATION SHEET

The Friends' Magazine is published three times a year

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Annual Subscription: £30 (Joint: £40);
Family (two adults and all their children
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Museum

**Pitt Rivers Museum, South Parks Road,
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01865 270927**

www.prm.ox.ac.uk

Email: ea@prm.ox.ac.uk

Open: Tuesday-Sunday 10.00-16.30

Monday 12.00-16.30

Admission FREE.

Highlight tours

Wednesdays 14.30 and 15.15

Volunteer-led introduction to the Museum.

Approximately 20 minutes.

No booking required.

After Hours

Occasional themed evening events.

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

Magazine

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those of the Museum. All contributors to the
Magazine are Friends unless otherwise stated.
For further information see:

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

MUSEUM DIARY DATES

Exhibitions and case displays

Didcot Case (Lower Gallery)

**Multaka: Connecting Threads
1 April to 1 March**

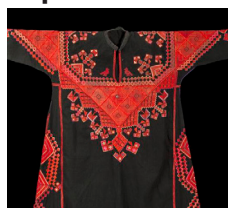


Photo: © PRM

Volunteers and
staff have worked
together to add new
perspectives to the
Textile collection
recently donated by
Jenny Balfour-Paul

Archive Case

10 December

to 1 May

**Memoirs in my
suitcase.**

Display relating to the
lives and experience
of Turkish migrant
workers in Western
Europe in the 1960s and 1970s.



Memoirs in my suitcase

Photo: © PRM

The Long Gallery

16 December - 4 May

**Blow up in Bissau: Photography and
Museum Revival in West Africa**

Prints documenting the collections once
held in the museums in Bissau before civil
war 1998-9.

Case Installations (Second Floor)

29 June - 26 January

Traces of the Past

Reflections on the 1994 Genocide against
the Tutsi in Rwanda.

Installation (South Entrance Corridor)

1 August - 16 February

Teaspoons and Trinkets

Display of gold dust spoons, handcrafted
in copper by pupils at Langtree School,
Reading, in 2019.

Family Friendly Events

Come and enjoy a wide variety of free family
friendly events, activities and workshops.
All children must be accompanied by a
responsible adult. www.prm.web.ox.ac.uk/events

Borrow a torch: The museum can be quite
dark in places. A torch will help you find your
way and discover hidden wonders in the
nooks and crannies. (£2 deposit)

Object handling, Saturdays 11.00-13.00

FRIENDS' DIARY DATES

Talk: What remains

Wednesday 15 January, 18.30

Sir Philip Pullman, English
novelist and author. Patron
of the Pitt Rivers Museum.

NB: A free event for Friends
only, limited to 60 places.

To book, email: gillian.

morriss-kay@dpag.ox.ac.uk



Sir Philip Pullman

**Party: Friends of the Pitt Rivers Burns
Night party**

Saturday 25 January,

18.30 to 20.30

A Burns night party

consisting of a display of
dancing, bagpipe music,
Scottish music, poetry,
Scottish inspired nibbles,
drinks and a raffle. To

book contact Terry Bremble: g.bremble@gmail.com
or 01865 390489

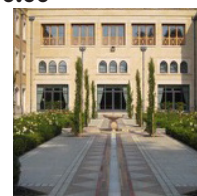


Spring Away Day

Tuesday 4 February, 10.00

A special opportunity to
visit the Oxford Centre
for Islamic Studies.

Enquiries to Felicity
Wood: felicity2wood@gmail.com
or 01865
554281



OXCIS Garden

**Talk: An Affair with a Village: Wrapping
up 45 years of research in a Kyushu
Community**

Wednesday 19 February, 18.30

Professor Joy Hendry, Emeritus professor of
anthropology, Oxford Brookes University.
Joy will be talking about her long term
relationship with Kyushu, Japan.

KK Day: Last Rites

Saturday 14 March, 10.00 - 16.00

A day of talks looking
at the rituals involved
with death in 4 cultures,
ranging from Ghanaian
coffins through funeral
pyres and evolving UK
practices to Zoroastrian
rites.



Dance Macabre

Wednesday evening talks in Pitt Rivers
Lecture Room, access via Robinson
close, South Parks Road, OX1 3PP Visitors
welcome: £2. No Parking. Tea from 18.00.

For further information contact: julieteccles@virginmedia.com.