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Pitt Rivers Museum

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IN THIS ISSUE

2 Museum Musings; Editorial
3 From The Museum; Director In Africa
4 Hawaiian Quilts
5 Contemporary Art
6 Chinese Musical Instruments
7 Activating The Archive: Digital Exhibition
8 Modernising The PRM Building
9 Keble Away Day
10 Ethiopic Scriptures
11 Battles Over Books
12 Museum Information; Members' Dates

Cover image: Ensemble Silk & Bamboo with puppeteer Jose Navarro and Community Connector Jenny Wang (page 6) Detail below

Museum Musings

Photo © Anthony Flemming

Kingship is a recurring theme in anthropology. Sir James Frazer started it in '*The Golden Bough*', where the divine king, the rex Nemorensis of the Diana cult recorded in classical sources, who was invariably killed by his successor, was central to his thesis. Following Frazer's lead, anthropologists looked for evidence of contemporary divine kings and found the Shilluk people in what is now South Sudan. Here the king (Reth) is considered divine and was often killed by his successors: a 1911 photograph of the Reth's enclosure by Charles Seligman, who first described the Shilluk kingship, is in the PRM collection. All this came to mind watching the coronation earlier this summer. Of course, we do not consider our kings to be divine (and we very rarely kill them), but the ritual in Westminster Abbey was, nonetheless, a mix of secular and sacred. How did this come about? Sovereigns in their absolute form are god-like in the sense that they can act without constraint or censure. Therefore, in their origins, were kings modelled on Gods, or might it be that Gods were modelled upon kings? The example of the Shilluk hints at the former: the concept of divine kings, then divinely-endorsed kings, along with the elaborate rituals surrounding them, led anthropologist A.M. Hocart to suggest that rituals were the origins of 'government'. He considered the obligations of ritual observance to such kings to be the first instances of individuals being compelled to do things in a kind of polity. Without going into details, the ethnographic record has been interpreted by many as broadly supporting this view. If so, it seems that kingship and perhaps governance itself is something born of the metaphysical world of religious belief and ushered into the physical world for the practical purposes of statehood. No surprise then, the mix of sacred and secular in Westminster Abbey. Once loosed in this way kings (or queens) might be hard to contain, but for constant fear of murderous successors, or endless rituals to observe. Our monarch too is constrained, though more by the legal processes which began at Runnymede in 1215. Some may be sceptical of rituals or the sacred, of kings or government for that matter, but they are tightly intertwined and run deep in all cultures including our own.

Anthony Flemming, *Member of the PRM Liaison Committee*

Editorial

Photo © Dawn Osborne

As I look at this magazine, I think that, as the world opens up, we are leaving the Pandemic behind us. The Museum has recovered, and, as well as being busy, has started in person workshops again like the Chinese Musical Instruments project on our cover (see also Page 6). The Director and staff members have been able to travel out far into the World representing the Museum on the World stage (see Pages 3 and 4). Members of the Museum (formerly known as, but still very much our Friends) have started to meet again and enjoy themselves (most recently learning about the history of Keble College) (see our article on Page 9).

However, we are, very much changed, I feel after the Pandemic. Projects like the Digital Exhibition (see page 7) have shown us the extent to which we can regularly use new technologies to reach out to people far away in a sustainable fashion. It has also given an even greater appreciation of cross-fertilisation of many media. The Museum has become a host for contemporary art (see Page 5 on the Marina Abramović exhibition) and, more than ever, books are being seen as cultural objects, rather than the principal way to convey information (see Pages 10 and 11). I feel we have been modernised in ways other than the facilities and building (see Page 8) and the newer responsible attitudes to being custodian of objects of cultural importance that the Director and staff champion. The Pandemic, though awful, has further opened our minds to new possibilities and how daily life can be made more interesting and exciting.

Dawn Osborne, *Editor*

Museum News

Photo: © PRM

The Museum is getting ready for the long summer ahead and, now that school vacations have started, we can already see families and tourists returning to the Museum in force. With all the international schools having returned, it really does feel like the Museum is back to full attendance. Museum bookings have also picked up and we were excited to host our first wedding earlier in June, a few months after we had been awarded a licence. Both the wedding party and the Registrar said the Museum was truly unique and a special place in which to be wed. We look forward to hosting more weddings in the future!

Some staff changes have recently taken place. We said goodbye to Jozie Kettle who left the Museum after many years working in public engagement. We are delighted to welcome Fatai Lawal as our new Facility Manager; she comes with a wealth of experience and was previously Facility Manager at the Dept of Oncology. Fatai is a keen footballer and is already coordinating a football match across GLAM (Gardens, Libraries, and Museums of Oxford)!

A new reason for visiting the Museum on Fridays is to join one of our guided tours. During these you get to enjoy and hear about the history of a selection of eight favourite objects that have been chosen by our tour guides. Tours are free for members (they are £5 for non-members and £3 for children). The simplest way to join a tour is to book through the Museum website (‘*Guided tours’* are under ‘*Events’* on the ‘*What’s On’* page.)

The shop is looking good and is well worth visiting to see the new set of scarves and textiles. We also have some beautiful, embroidered gifts from the Oxford Ramala Friendship Association (remember that Museum members get a 10% Discount)

Karrine Sanders *PRM Senior Administrator*

The Director in Africa

Photo: © PRM

Laura Van Broekhoven, the Museum Director, has been in Kenya and Tanzania with Marina De Alarcón (Joint Head of Collections) and Thandiwe Wilson (Research Assistant). The purpose of the visit was to participate in an educational programme, to take part in traditional Maasai healing ceremonies and to have meetings with Maasai families close to their homes. As a PRM contribution, a gift of cows, funded by the Staple Trust, were presented to the families.

The trip was part of the ‘*Maasai Living Cultures Project’*, which started in 2017 when Maasai cultural leaders visited the Museum to see Maasai objects. Over the following years, further research and additional visits took place and, as they looked through traditional Masai artefacts in the collection, the leaders identified five objects as culturally sensitive family heirlooms. In Maasai tradition, their absence from a family is believed to incur bad luck, so the objects’ presence in the Museum continues to cause harm to descendants. None are therefore now on display or the subject of research at the Museum, while guidance is being taken from Maasai traditional and religious leaders on finding the best way to care for them.

The ‘*Maasai Living Cultures Project*’ is a collaboration between the Pitt Rivers Museum, Maasai community leaders and InsightShare, an Oxfordshire-based social enterprise, which supports indigenous peoples to protect their territories, languages and cultures. The project is funded by the Staples Trust, a Sainsbury family charitable trust, and is an important part of the Museum’s ongoing work in building equitable relations with indigenous peoples whose material culture is represented in the PRM collections.

We hope to have further details of the Director’s visit in a future edition of the Magazine.

Jonathan Bard*, Member of the PRM Editorial Committee*

Photo: © PRM

The Director with Masai leaders in the Museum discussing Masai heirlooms

A day with the Poakalani Quilters

Photo: © OHA, 2022

Marenka Thompson-Odlum, Lei Ayat-Verdadero of OHA, and Sissy Serrao in front of the 'Ula and Manu Palekaiko quilt designs

On 31 March 2022, 15 Hawaiian quilts, all 45 by 45 inches square, were placed on public display at the Office of Hawaiian Affairs ('OHA') in Honolulu for a one-day exhibition. These quilts, executed by the Poakalani Quilting group, were commissioned by the Museum in 2020 as part of the Art Fund-supported *'New Collecting'* project.

The aim of the project was to work collaboratively with artists, makers, and practitioners whose culture and artform is often under or mis-represented in museum settings. To achieve this, it was important to give utmost creative freedom to partners, so that could fully express their narrative. Therefore, when the Museum first approached the Poakalani Quilters it was to commission a single large (90 by 90 inches square) quilt to accompany the 'ahu ula (Hawaiian feather cloak) that is on display in the Museum. However, after discussions with the quilters, it was decided that one quilt couldn't tell the story of Hawai'i, so instead the quilters produced 15 smaller quilts to tell the larger and diverse history of the Hawaiian Islands. This also allowed for more quilters to be involved in the project, bringing in their own personal stories and travels into the quilts.

Quilting emerged as a growing part of the Hawaiian culture in the early nineteenth century, originally introduced by Christian missionaries, but reworked by Hawaiians to reflect and represent their own indigenous designs and knowledge. All the commissioned quilts were designed by the late John Serrao and quilted by Poakalani Quilting teachers and students. As founders of the quilting group, Serrao and his wife Althea Poakalani Serrao were master quilt makers who also taught Hawaiian quilting workshops. The designs were carefully selected with the guidance of Cissy Serrao, daughter of John and Althea, who with the help of her family continues her forebears' legacy. In an interview with the OHA Cissy said, "We're very proud of this tradition that was handed down to us by my great grandparents. It's a tradition that we still hold close to our heart, and we are so honoured that we can continue this and not only teach in our family, but to anyone who wants to learn Hawaiian quilting. We want to be sure the world can see what we do here – it's such a unique art."

The 15 quilts capture various aspects of the nature, culture, history, and ever-changing dynamic of Hawai'i. Some quilts showcase the vast Pacific Ocean and marine life that surrounds the islands. The marine life which nourished the islands and the ocean that historically acted as pathways between the islands. Other quilts look to nourishment that comes from the land in the form of fruits and ground provisions like kalo (taro). Others pay homage to Hawaiian arts such as feather work and hula.

Curator, Marenka Thompson-Odlum travelled to Oahu to meet with quilters to express her gratitude and learn more about the meaning of the quilts and the quilting process. During the one-day exhibition at the OHA, Cissy and Marenka did a live-stream with all the Poakalani quilters in Japan who participated in the project, but were unable to attend. Through the project the quilters, separated by the Covid-19 pandemic, were able to stay connected through a shared goal, which is reflected in each quilt.

On 11 June 2024 the PRM will launch the special exhibition, *'Mauka to Makai'* (From the mountains to the sea) which will feature the quilts as well as other contemporary acquisitions from Hawai'i. A teaser of the exhibition will be exhibited in the Artist Case in the Court of the Museum from mid-summer 2023.

Dr Marenka Thompson-Odlum, *Research Curator*

A Farewell to Splendour

Photo: © Marina Abramović, 2022

Still from the video 'Presence and Absence'

Over the past ten months, visitors exploring the Museum may have encountered a unique case display. The special installation '*Marina Abramović @ Pitt Rivers Museum*' has recently concluded its captivating run at the Museum. The prominent case display showcased an object called the Witch's Ladder (a rope tied with feathers from England), alongside Marina Abramović's drawings and a video work titled '*The Witch Ladder*'. The video was part of a longer film '*Presence and Absence*', in which the pioneer performance artist interacted with thirteen carefully chosen artefacts from the galleries of the Museum during her research residency in the summer of 2021.

According to Abramović, she experienced the Pitt Rivers Museum as an enormous force field, brimming with the energies of objects and their former owners and users. She was drawn to specific items by their powerful energies, stating that "The objects chose me". In the film, Abramović interacted with each object performatively: hovering her hands over them to perceive their aura; when the objects were removed, her hands remained in the same positions, capturing their energy in the vacant space. By doing so, she brought presence to absence and demonstrated the materiality of immateriality. This simple, yet powerful installation offered visitors an alternative perspective to observe, sense, and encounter museum objects.

As we bid farewell to a truly remarkable creation, it is also time to reflect on the display of contemporary art in ethnographic museums such as the Pitt Rivers. This has been an evolving area of exploration that requires careful curation, dialogue, and collaboration between museum professionals and artists. On May 20, 2023, the Pitt Rivers Museum organised an event called '*Curating the Contemporary: Working with Art and Artists at the Pitt Rivers Museum*'. Curators and academics who have worked with contemporary artists and artworks in the Museum delivered a series of pop-up talks, sharing their experiences and thoughts on ongoing exhibitions, past projects, and art in general.

Is Pitt Rivers a museum of art? Although many objects in the Museum were originally collected as objects of utility, over time they have become objects of art in their own ways. Then, can Pitt Rivers also be a space for contemporary art? This is where controversies arose. For example, discussions around the artworks of Australian artist Christian Thompson in the Australian Art display on the Clore Balcony sparked a debate about whether these photographs should be considered as Aboriginal art and exhibited alongside more 'traditional' artworks. The significance of highlighting the wide range of indigenous experiences and art production becomes evident when confronted with enquiries like this. Just like 'traditional' or ceremonial forms of art, contemporary artworks also delve into themes of indigenous identity, colonialism, representation, and museum history. As Professor Chris Dorsett aptly remarked, the Pitt Rivers Museum embraces the idea that 'anything could be in here.'

While the Pitt Rivers Museum may not exclusively focus on art, it serves as a platform where objects, including contemporary artworks, can engage with visitors, provoking discussions and challenging preconceived notions of what constitutes art. By providing a space for these dialogues and exhibiting diverse forms of artistic expression, the Museum provides visitors with new perspectives to see the Museum and its collections. Just like the Marina Abramović installation, as highlighted by Professor Clare Harris, when standing on the ground floor of the Museum, the artist's presence was palpable, reflected across the glass display cases. The installation invited visitors to perceive the Museum and its artefacts through the lens of Marina Abramović's artistic vision, inviting a fresh and thought-provoking encounter with the exhibited objects.

Lan Xiao, *PhD Student, St Cross College, Oxford University*

Play! Project - Working with Oxford's Chinese community

Chinese community volunteers viewing the instruments in the research room. Yangqin and Muyu in the foreground

Between January and June this year the Museum's *'Play!'* team and Community Connector Jenny Wang worked with Oxford's local Chinese community on an intergenerational research project involving nine secondary school-age children and their parents. After viewing the Museum's collection of instruments from China earlier this year, the participating volunteers attended a "how to research" seminar and worked closely with Museum staff to conduct library-based and online research into the objects.

Muyu by Zimo Fu / 傅子墨 age 12

As a bilingual project, families were able to draw upon Mandarin-language and English-language sources to bring a broader, international approach to the research. While visiting relatives in China, the family researching the Muyu (see description below) also took the time to visit a Buddhist temple to see one in action - they are still used by Buddhist monks across the globe to this day. Here is the English version of the Muyu volunteer research:

"The muyu, also known as wooden fish, is a Buddhist percussion instrument played with a mallet. Traditionally the muyu was made strictly out of wood, but modern versions incorporate composite plastics into the designs. Many types of muyu have a decorative, fish-like appearance but the most simplistic versions consist of a round wooden body with a slit at the bottom. The muyu originated in Buddhist temples where it was hung up on the ceiling and struck at various times of the day to remind monks of certain tasks like eating, lectures and chores. They have also been used during funeral processions to maintain a slow and steady rhythm, and to accompany Buddhist prayers and chants to keep the monks in a state of wakeful awareness. Today, muyu are sometimes used as part of modern orchestras, where they are used to convey religious feeling within the music."

Volunteers were also able to inject their opinions and personalities into their writing. This was an enjoyable experience for visitors viewing the digital display and listening to the talks, since Museum staff are usually required to produce more objective descriptions of Museum objects. Here is the English version of the Yangqin volunteer research:

"The yangqin, literally meaning "raised zither" (a class of stringed instruments), is a percussion instrument commonly used in Chinese music. Like the piano, the yangqin is played as an accompaniment to ensembles or as a solo instrument, and the instrument sounds when beaters strike its strings. Its timbre is very changeable: it can sound like pearls crisply falling down a jade plate, the sound of a tinkling mountain spring, or like gurgling water when played fast. Prior to the Middle Ages, there was an instrument similar to the yangqin called santur in the Middle East. During the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), with increasingly friendly exchanges between China, West Asia and East Asia, the santur was introduced to China from Persia by sea. At first, it was only popular in the Guangdong Province, but since the late Qing dynasty (1644-1911) it has become popular all over the country."

This work gave the museum the unique opportunity to highlight the perspectives of Oxford's Chinese diaspora community on the collections database, and all the instruments researched now have the community research added to their records. The research project culminated in two days of public events on 1st and 2nd June, with talks by the family groups and a bilingual digital display showcasing their research in Mandarin and English. To bring the sounds of the instruments to life, the families were joined by traditional Chinese ensemble *'Silk & Bamboo'* from SOAS University of London and puppeteer Jose Navarro (see cover photo). The Museum space was also decorated with artwork that the participating children were inspired to create based on their research.

Megan Christo, *Play! Project Collections & Public Engagement Officer*

Activating The Archive: Digital Exhibition

For funding purposes our digital exhibition had to be 'pandemic-proof' i.e. could be run through virtual meetings and output that would not rely on museum or research staff being physically in the museum. Once the project started, many of the COVID restrictions had been lifted and a small group of project partners were able to visit the museum for the last workshop in 2022 (Figure 1). However, we thought carefully about how we maximised the benefits of the online workshops and created easier access to the collections. Once we did the virtual workshops and researched the collections together, we distilled what we had researched into a digital exhibition accessible to diverse public audiences.

Figure 1: Ashley Coutu, Tabitha Kabora, and Yannick Ndoinyo next to our virtual project team members (on projector screen) as part of one of our hybrid workshops.

Each of fifteen project partners video-recorded themselves reflecting on a single object or photograph from the PRM collections. As you can imagine, we received a range of different creative types of video content from each of the 15 partners. Thus, part of the work of our design collaborators *'Creative Jay'* is to take the content from each partner and standardise it so that audiences can engage with the content of the videos more easily.

Figure 2: 1998.349.25.1 People by sorghum fields near Gangu village, Alego, Kenya.

Figure 3: 1991.13.1 Elephant tusk from the Benin Kingdom carved with Edo and European figures, mudfish, snakes, and crocodiles, and evidence of burning on end of tusk.

The prompt that Tabitha Kathora my co-investigator and I gave the partners was this: "What interested you about this object/image and how did it help you engage with the topic of colonialism and environmental histories through museum collections?" Many of our project team chose the same photograph for their video reflection: it was taken in 1936, featuring people standing on a path next to a field of sorghum in Gangu village, Alego, Kenya (Figure 2). We discussed this image thoroughly during one of our workshops. The video reflections on this one photograph were diverse. Poshendra Satyal used the photograph as a jumping-off point for discussing the social history of gender and power relationships in colonial contexts, especially in this image between the married woman and the colonial missionary. Agatha Nthenge took the photograph in a different direction and used it to discuss agricultural biodiversity (which could be seen in the fields behind the people, the enormous height of the sorghum, and the differences of crops grown in this region of Kenya today: these which are often mono-crop cultures, with a significant move away from growing indigenous grains such as sorghum, due in part to the impact of colonial planting schemes). This photograph, therefore, is a detailed window into the past, not only of social, but also of agricultural histories.

Our project partner Uwagbale Edward-Ekpu from Benin City, Nigeria chose the charred elephant tusk taken from there as part of the British 1897 expedition for his video reflection (Figure 3). He discussed the relevance of the carved tusks as Edo history books, because they were carved as commemorative altar pieces upon the Oba's passing with historical depictions of what happened in the Benin kingdom during the period of the Oba's reign. He also discussed how elephant ivory was an important material from the forest kingdom, and that fewer than 50 elephants remain today in Edo State. The symbolism of the elephant to Edo people, as well as the importance of the guilds of ivory carvers who were skilled in carving these histories into the tusks, were lost when these objects were looted. Uwagbale is currently working with the PRM team to update labels and interpretation of objects in the Benin display case. He has also collaborated with PRM learning officers Melanie Rowntree and Rebecca McVean to create new content around the collections from Benin as part of our engagement with young people on the history and ongoing repatriation of the collections from the Benin kingdom.

A project webpage can be found on the PRM site: https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/activating-archive. We hope you enjoy the varied stories that have come out of the digital exhibition of the project. We thank our project partners and look forward to continued collaboration with them to interpret and research the PRM collections in new ways, in years to come.

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

Modernising the Pitt Rivers Museum: an interview with John Simmons

Photo: © Jorge Rohan licensed under Creative Commons

Photo: © PRM

Fig. 1. Lighting in the Pitt Rivers Museum. (a) As it was before 2014. (b) As it is now

The 1886 overgrown shed-like building that now contains some 22,000 items of the 550,000 in the PRM collection had always needed modernisation, but work really only started in the 1990s. Much of this was done under the general supervision of John Simmons, the PRM buildings' manager. In 1984, after a degree in ancient and modern history, he joined the PRM as a member of the front-of-house team and ended up running the building.

John retired last year, and we recently met up. As we wandered round the public and private parts of the museum, our conversation kept being interrupted as yet another person stopped to chat with him – clearly a much loved and much missed member of the PRM staff.

Here are my questions and John's answers:

What was the PRM like when you arrived in 1984?

Dark! The glass panes in the original roof had been blacked out to avoid light damage (Fig.1a). It also suffered from heat fluctuations as climate control was rudimentary. There were fewer than 20 people on the staff (there are about 60 now), some of whom, together with part of the stored collection, were housed in the buildings at 60-62 Banbury Road (a possible site for an expanded PRM). Knowledge of the location of other undisplayed collection items was then stored in the heads of a few people as there was no IT.

What are the major changes since you arrived?

The driving force for change was Michael O'Hanlon, who arrived as Director in 1998. He had previously been at the British Museum, and I think he was a bit shocked to discover just how old-fashioned the PRM was. He set out to modernise it, but producing designs, raising money and getting permissions took time. Once it was decided that the Banbury Road site would not be viable for the Museum (it is now Kellogg College), he got the go-ahead to build an extension on the south side of the PRM.

Cathie Wright, the administrator, directed the external contractors, while I tried to ensure that nothing went wrong, and that what they thought was appropriate for PRM actually worked. The roof was rebuilt in 1999/2000 and the extension finished in 2007. This not only brought everyone on site, but gave us more exhibition space. The new platform at the entrance from the National History Museum was constructed in 2008/9 and modern lighting was installed in 2014 (Fig. 1b).

What do you see as your contribution to today's Museum?

No one does anything on their own at the PRM, but I particularly worked on the new lighting and the climate-control system, which is housed under the entrance platform. I also helped modernize the top floor which, in the 1980s, was split between display cases and storage space. I particularly helped bring and display all the weaponry up there – I particularly love the wall of shields. We also built and renovated many cases (old ones have rounded corners, new ones have cheaper straight edges) and I enjoyed organising their displays. I also helped make the Cook case more expensive! I was worried about its load on the first-floor balcony and brought in a structural engineer who told us to reduce its weight by 30% through replacing steel with aluminium. Fortunately, the Friends helped with the extra costs.

Finally, I asked John about where the 95% of the collection not shown in the Museum is stored. John explained that there is no simple answer as, not only is it is widely distributed, but the locations keep moving as the University keeps changing storage arrangements for the museums.

Jonathan Bard, *Member of the PRM Magazine Committee*

Members' Awayday to Keble College, May 23rd 2023

Keble College Chapel, in the sunken main quad.

The West end of the chapel

Photos: © Gillian Morriss-Kay

This enjoyable visit was led by the St. John's College historian, Professor William Whyte. As we walked around, he explained that the architecture, unique among Oxford colleges, was the result of a confluence of reforms: ecclesiastical, social and educational. The laying of the foundation stone of Keble College in 1868, by the Archbishop of Canterbury, symbolized this trio of reforms.

The Light of the World, by Holman Hunt

The religious and educational components were spearheaded by three major Oxford figures: John Keble, John Henry Newman and Edward Pusey. They were all ordained Anglican priests who met as fellows of Oriel College in the 1820s. They were concerned that the rise of Evangelicalism had moved the Church of England away from its Roman Catholic roots and strongly felt the importance of reasserting the sacramental and ceremonial aspects of worship. They published a series of *'Tracts for the Times'*, promoting their views. John Keble soon left Oriel to practice their ideals as a country clergyman in Hampshire; while there, he wrote a book of poems, *'The Christian Year',* several of which became greatly-loved hymns. Their popularity resulted in his invitation to return to Oxford as Professor of Poetry in 1831. The sermon he preached in the University Church in 1833 was regarded by Newman as the starting gun for the *'Oxford Movement'*.

Meanwhile, Oxford University had become aware of the need to escape from its ridiculed image as a finishing school for sons of the aristocracy. Social changes resulting from the Industrial Revolution and an increasing population had created pressure for the university education of middle-class young men. Oxford's existing colleges were unable to meet the need, so the case for creating a new college was clear. After John Keble's death in 1866, the *'Oxford Movement'* group launched a successful financial appeal, based on the widespread affection for his poetry, to fund a new college as his memorial.

The founders chose William Butterfield (1814-1900) as architect, based on his previous ecclesiastical buildings. Brick was necessary because of the expense of stone: he overcame the fact that brick couldn't be carved by sourcing bricks of different colours and creating the multicoloured patterns that give the college walls their unique "knitting in brick" character. Internally, the traditional Oxford staircase system was modified by the addition of transverse corridors to mimic monastic architecture.

The crowning glory of the first phase of building was the chapel, one of the largest in Oxford, exceptionally high, and with stunning mosaics. It was funded by a generous donation from the richest man in Britain, William Gibbs (1790-1875), who had made his fortune importing nitrate-rich Peruvian guano as fertilizer. He died before the chapel was completed in 1876; two years later, his sons announced a further donation, sufficient to build a dining hall large enough to seat the whole undergraduate community, and a library. The chapel should have been further enhanced by the gift, in 1873, of Holman Hunt's picture '*The Light of the World',* but Butterfield refused to house it there. After a few years in the library, it was moved to its present location in the side-chapel designed by J.T. Mickelthwaite.

Butterfield's ambitions for grandeur contrasted with the College's social intentions, which were to provide first class education at modest cost for young men of sufficient academic merit from any social background. Although an Anglican foundation, it was legally required to accept applicants of any religion after the *'University Tests Act'* of 1871. The College was at last opened to women undergraduates in 1979. During the past few decades, it has gained some striking architectural additions that blend well with the old, maintaining the College's interesting and unique character.

Gillian Morriss-Kay, *former Keble College Lecturer.*

Acknowledgement: *'Keble Past and Present'* by Averil Cameron and Ian Archer (2008)

Ethiopic Manuscripts at the Bodleian Libraries

The Bodleian Libraries are the custodian of one of the most significant collections of manuscripts from Ethiopia and Eritrea in the UK. Most of these manuscripts are written in Geez, though a smaller number are in Amharic and other languages. Geez, or Classical Ethiopic, is a Semitic language that was spoken in the first centuries CE in the Kingdom of Aksum. This East-African polity drew its wealth from the coastal regions of the Red Sea and from the trade between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean. While the language was used in inscriptions and on other artefacts already in the third century CE, the production of manuscripts must have begun after the conversion of one of Aksum's rulers to Christianity towards the mid fourth century CE. Only a minute number of manuscripts from this period survive and are kept in monasteries in northern Ethiopia. Most Ethiopic manuscripts in the Bodleian Libraries were produced between the fourteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Image: © National Portrait Gallery, London

Fig. 1. Archbishop William Laud (1573–1645)

The Bodleian acquired its first Ethiopic manuscript, *'MS Laud Or. 204'*, shortly after its reopening in 1602. The manuscript was donated in 1636 by the Archbishop of Canterbury William Laud (1573–1645), Chancellor of the University (Fig.1). The manuscript, dating to the fifteenth or early sixteenth century, contains a Mariological work called *'Argānona Māryām' ('Harp of Mary')* which was written by the Ethiopian theologian Giyorgis of Saglā.

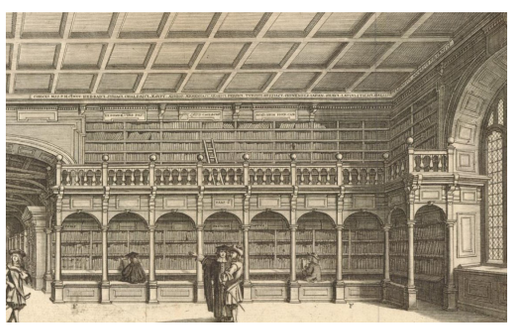

Image: © The Trustees of the British Museum

Fig. 2. Bodleian's Duke Humfrey's reading room, detail taken from David Loggan's Oxonia illustrata, 1675

Around 1692, the library acquired three more Ethiopic manuscripts as part of a collection of manuscripts in various Oriental languages owned by the Orientalist and Biblical scholar Edward Pococke (1604–91). Of the three, the first one is a Psalter *'MS. Pococke 3'*; the second a liturgical work *'MS. Pococke 6'*, and the third a computus *'MS. Pococke 9'*. We may see these manuscripts reproduced in a 1675 engraving of the Bodleian's Duke Humfrey's reading room (Fig. 2). Here Ethiopic is placed between Coptic and Armenian.

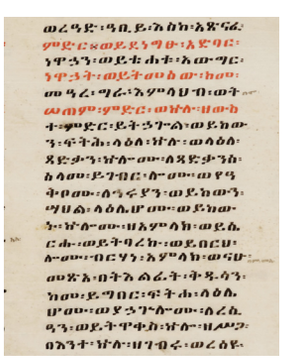

Image: © The Bodleian Libraries

Fig. 3. Detail of Ethiopic manuscript formerly property of James Bruce, Bodleian Libraries, MS Bruce 74, The Beginning of the 'Book of Enoch', fol. 7r

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the Bodleian acquired a further twenty-five manuscripts that had been purchased or commissioned in Ethiopia by the Scottish traveller James Bruce (1730–1794 Fig.3); Bruce studied Ethiopic and reached the source of the Blue Nile in 1770. He commissioned many manuscripts, of which the four copies he had made of the '*Book of Enoch'* were the most celebrated at the time; two of these were given to the Bodleian Library. Bruce's manuscripts also included the '*Synaxarium'* or Book of Saints and copies of the '*Kəbra nagaśt'*, Ethiopia's national epic.

Image: © In the Public Domain

Fig. 4. Edward Daniel Clarke. Stipple engraving by H. Meyer, 1814, after J. Jackson, Wellcome Collection no. 1851i

A few years later, in 1809, Edward Daniel Clarke (1769–1822; Fig.4), Professor of Mineralogy in Cambridge, sold a collection of manuscripts to the Bodleian which he had acquired over the course of travels across Greece and the Middle East and which included four Ethiopic examples. These manuscripts were catalogued by the German orientalist Christian Friedrich August Dillmann in 1848.

By the mid-twentieth century the Bodleian had acquired an additional sixty-six manuscripts that were catalogued in 1951 by Edward Ullendorff. According to Ullendorff a considerable portion of these works had been brought to Britain by individuals who had taken part in the Battle of Magdala of 1868. Other manuscripts were donated or purchased after 1951. The largest group of works, fifty-four, was given to the library by the Oxford University medical officer and bibliophile Bent E. Juel-Jensen (1922–2006). These latter manuscripts, which include a finely illustrated psalter (Fig.5), are currently being catalogued by an international team of researchers.

Dr Jacopo Gnisci, *Lecturer in the Art and Visual Cultures of the Global South at UCL.* **Dr César Merchán-Hamann**,*Curator of Hebraica and Judaica, Bodleian Libraries, & Director of the Leopold Muller Memorial Library*

Image: © The Bodleian Libraries

Fig. 5. An Ethiopic Psalter formerly in the collection of B. Juel-Jensen, Bodleian Libraries, MS Aeth. d. 19, Christ, John, the Archangel Michael, John the Baptist, and other Apostles, fol. 147v

Battles over books

The Bodleian Library is not a new institution. Although we celebrated our 400th anniversary in 2002, what we were in fact celebrating was the rebranding of a much older organisation, one which was formed in 1320 by a benefaction from Thomas Cobham, Bishop of Worcester who founded Oxford's first university library, in a new building adjacent to the University Church (you can still see it today above what is now the Vaults café). That library was destroyed – almost completely – during the second wave of the Reformation, under the instructions of the Commissioners of Edward VI who visited the University in 1549-50. The books they found in the University Library were clearly not to their liking. The library moved in the 1480s from the building adjacent to the University Church to a new room, above the Divinity School, designed to house not only the books given by Thomas Cobham in the early 14th century, but in particular the magnificent donation of hundreds of books of 'new learning' given by Humfrey, Duke of Gloucester in the 1430s and 1440s. All that survives of the 500 or so volumes today are 11 books, only four of them in Oxford.

The destruction of libraries and archives has a long and ignoble history. We know a surprising amount about some of the earliest libraries and archives on the planet, those formed by the civilisations of ancient Mesopotamia, where collections of knowledge were formed, organised, and preserved from around 3000 BCE. The famous library of Ashurbanipal, housed in the temples of the great city of Nineveh were formed in part by deliberate and targeted theft of texts (in the form of clay tablets marked with cuneiform script) preserved in the libraries of enemy states. From that point on libraries and archives have been battlegrounds over ideas, beliefs, culture and memory. But the deliberate attempts to destroy libraries have often prompted acts of preservation and renewal. The spoliation of Oxford's University library in the middle of the 16th century prompted Sir Thomas Bodley, an Oxford graduate whose Protestant family had sought refuge in Europe during the reign of Mary Tudor and the brief revival of Catholicism in the 1550s, who returned to Oxford in the 1590s and found the medieval library room (that we call Duke Humfrey's Library today) 'laid waste'. He lamented the attack on the books, even though they represented the 'old religion' (and perhaps the old technology of manuscript). He committed himself, his network, and his considerable financial resources to rebuilding the library, not just physically, but intellectually. Most importantly he established "a standing rent, for the augmentation of books, for officers' stipends and for other pertinent occasions". This standing rent is what we today call the endowment, but unfortunately John Rous, the second librarian, was forced to 'loan' it to Charles I to help him fight the Civil War, and it was recorded as a debt in the libraries' accounts until 1798 when it was written off.

Photo: © John Cairns

Old Bodleian interior

Photo: © John Cairns

Radcliffe Camera, Bodleian Library

Photo: © Ian Jackson

Bodleian library Quadrangle, main entrance with Earl of Pembroke statue

Unfortunately libraries and archives continue to be battlegrounds today, and librarians and archivists find themselves on the front line of defending democracy and open society. In August 2021 as the Taliban swept through Afghanistan, libraries, especially those established in provincial towns to support female education, were targeted for destruction. In Ukraine, more than 300 libraries have been damaged with more than twenty completely destroyed. More chillingly, Russian troops in occupied Ukraine identified books in Ukrainian, or about Ukrainian history and culture on the shelves of local libraries, and burned them. In many states of America, such as Florida and Louisiana, the stock of public libraries are being heavily censored, with library staff being abused and threatened, following politically-motivated seizure of control of public library boards.

Libraries and archives support the education of individuals and communities, make a diversity of knowledge available, and protect the rights of citizens through preserving essential documentation. They are reference points for facts and truth in an age of disinformation and 'alternate facts'. They preserve and celebrate the identity of communities, and of society, as a whole. Although libraries and archives have been attacked throughout history, librarians and archivists have a long and proud tradition of fighting back to preserve knowledge in the service of democracy and open society.

Richard Ovenden, *Bodley's Librarian and Head of Gardens, Libraries and Museums*

Photos: © Graham Cawsey

Pitt Rivers Museum Autumn 2023

INFORMATION SHEET

The Members' Magazine is published three times a year

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Museum

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Open: Tuesday-Sunday 10.00 - 17.00
Monday 12.00- 17.00
Admission FREE.
Refreshments. The Horsebox Coffee Company on the lawn is open from 9.00 - 17.00 daily, serving hot and cold drinks and homemade cakes. With delicious locally roasted coffee, scrumptious brownies, flapjacks and cookies, the Horsebox Café is the perfect place for a coffee break!
After Hours
Occasional themed evening events.
All museum events:
www.prm.ox.ac.uk/events

Magazine

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For further information see:

Membership

Membership: 01865 613000 membership@ prm.ox.ac.uk
Annual Subscription: £36 (Joint: £50); Student: £20 (18-25, in full time education). Life £500 (Joint £750) Benefits: Priority booking for Museum events and courses, Private views, Behind the scenes visits. Members only: Shop 10% discounts, Members' Magazine posted to you three times a year, Friends' lecture series.

MUSEUM DIARY DATES

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

Exhibitions and case displays

Didcot Case (Lower Gallery)
June 2023 - March 2025
Solomon Enos Ahupua'a
'Mo'olelo of Ahupua'a', a reimagined journey into an Hawaiian Ecosystem through a series of paintings by artist Solomon Enos drawing on the epic myth Hi'iakaikapoliopele.

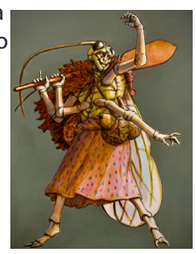
Image: © PRM
The Paddler, *Engytatus henryi* by Solomon Enos

Archive case - First Floor
April 2023 - March 2024
Collaborating with the past: Native American portraiture
American ambrotypist, Shane Balkowitsch has set out to create one thousand portraits of Native American people using this historical wet plate photographic process, and to collaborate closely with each sitter on their photographs.


Photo: © PRM
Ira High Elk (Scares the Eagle) Lakota nation Photographed 23 October 2020

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


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

Object handling
Object handling in the Pitt Rivers. Discover more about wonderful and fascinating objects from the Museum's collections. Free weekly Saturday drop-in activity run by museum volunteers. 11.00 - 13.00

MEMBERS' DIARY DATES

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

2023
Event: BB Lecture
Museums: their relevance today
Friday 29 September, 18.00
Natural History Museum Lecture Hall
Sir Paul Ruddock is a Trustee of the British Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of New York, and a former Trustee of the V&A and the Courtauld.
He will speak about the role of museums from the 17th century onwards as custodians of 6000 years of human history and their importance in the context of 21st century anxieties. Tickets available on ww.prm.ox.ac.uk


Photo: © Sir Paul Ruddock
Sir Paul Ruddock

Talk: Unmasked Spirit in the City
Wednesday 20 September, 18.00
Anthropologist David Pratten talks about *'UNMASKED Spirit in the City',* a radical new exhibition and installation that explores the personal stories behind modern masquerade in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, challenging traditional museology to unmask not just the costumed dancers, but also their emotional universes and economic realities.


Photo: © Zina Saro-Wiwa
Poster for Unmasked- Spirit in the City

Talk: Hawaiian Storytelling
Wednesday 18 October, 18.00
Research-Curator Marenka Thompson-Odlum talks about work commissioned from Solomon Enos and how it addresses the issues of problematic language at the PRM through an Hawaiian lens.

Further information, please contact julieteccles@virginmedia.com.