

MUSEUM REPORT, 2011

This year's range of enquiries and museum-related activity has been as busy and diverse as ever, starting with the first, and possibly only, research visit to the museum by a professional artist and writer who was seeking inspiration for a series of 'poems' representative of the range of burials, underground spaces and geology on Mendip.

This was followed by a visit from the BBC who were making a series of programs about early man in Britain. As it turned out, they ended up not making use of the material from Aveline's as they wanted their presenter to be able to produce the bones, like a conjurer's rabbit out of a hat, from the back of the presenter's car outside the cave. I was unhappy about the idea of transporting fragile, ancient remains to Mendip and then having them treated like stage props, however, not wishing to appear uncooperative, I consulted both our curatorial advisor, Andy Currant, and Professor Chris Stringer of the Natural History Museum, both of who agreed that this was not a request that should be pandered to so, much to the producer's irritation, I pointed out that what they wanted to do was inappropriate on several levels, and they would have to film the remains in the museum, or not at all. He said they were already doing that with Cheddar Man and other remains from Paviland and Creswell, and couldn't think up an 'creative' way of filming yet another museum visit, so they simply dropped any mention of the largest Mesolithic cemetery in Europe. I was thoroughly unimpressed by their attitude, as were those I consulted and I'd like to record my thanks to both Andy and Chris for their rapid and supportive responses.

Paul Pettit from the University of Sheffield visited the museum to borrow some Late Upper Palaeolithic flint artifacts for analysis by Laser Ablation-Inductively coupled Plasma Mass Spectrometry. This is part of a project to integrate new understanding of Late Upper Palaeolithic behaviour in Britain and analytical techniques to test hypotheses about the creation of land and resource use patterns in Britain. He has on loan some flints from Sun Hole and Aveline's Hole as part of this project.

I still receive a steady stream of enquiries via the Archaeology Department and have helped various students with their dissertation topics. In addition, Lucy Flower, from the University of London has spent two days in the museum as part of her PhD researching the evolution and palaeoecology of wolves in Britain and North West Europe during the Pliocene and Quaternary period, which involves collecting metric data from dental, cranial and post cranial remains in order to analyse changes in body size over time. As a result I now know far more about the identification of wolf bones than I did before!

Probably the most exciting project of the year was the archaeological dig in Read's Cavern on the Mendips conducted by student members of the UBSS and the Archaeology Department of the University of Bristol. Ruth Briggs, in particular, was active on the project and it was Ruth who discovered, whilst sieving some mud from the dig, an intact bronze brooch, which is quite the most beautiful specimen of its type that I have ever seen. This work was very much a return to our roots for the Society as Read's Cavern was the site of our second dig, which started in 1919. With the permission of the landowner, Sir David Wills, the finds from the excavation will very shortly be joining the other objects recovered from Read's

Cavern in our museum and a preliminary report will hopefully be appearing in the next issue of Proceedings.

It has been a busy and exciting year to be Museum Curator.

Linda Wilson, Museum Curator