

MUSEUM REPORT, 2017

I normally seem to start these reports by remarking on what a busy year we've had in the museum, but even by our standards, this year has been an exceptionally busy one. I'd like to start by saying a huge thank you to Allan Summerfield and Wendy Russ who have devoted a vast amount of time and energy to working in the museum and assisting with research visits.

After a preliminary visit last year by Dr Hazel Reade from the UCL Institute of Archaeology, researchers from the 'Up North' project returned to our collection. The project is funded by the European Research Council and is trying to understand the resettlement of northern Europe after the Last Glacial Maximum (ca. 26,500-19,000 years ago) and the subsequent diversification of the behaviour of those human groups in the context of climate and environmental change. Material was obtained from the Late Upper Palaeolithic and Creswellian period, which is numerous in King Arthur's Cave and Sun Hole. Samples were taken from large faunal species; Horse (*Equus*); Red Deer (*Cervus elalphus*) and Reindeer (*Rangifer tarandus*). Hazel, together with Dr Rhiannon Stevens from UCL and Dr Sophy Charlton from the Natural History Museum spent a total of five working days in the museum conducting the sampling to obtain material that can be tested for DNA, Radiocarbon Dating and Oxygen and Nitrogen Isotope analysis. Allan and Wendy took the lead in assisting with this research visit and in addition, another day was spent locating the necessary specimens and then returning them to storage.

Last year, I reported that the human material from Aveline's Hole has once again been attracting attention from researchers and I have been working in collaboration with Professor Ian Barnes and Tom Booth from the Natural History Museum who have taken DNA samples from some specimens, obtaining the surprising result that one piece of human bone was Neolithic rather than Mesolithic. The history of the collection has been examined in detail, and I am grateful to Desmond Donovan, our post-war curator, for his invaluable help sharing his direct knowledge of the immediate post-war years in our museum. As a result, we have, as far as possible, ruled out the possibility of a mix-up in the collection. Four more pieces of skull are currently with Rick Schulting and Tom Higham in Oxford, and the dates from these specimens

are awaited. A funding application has been submitted to enable further dates to be obtained. So, the story Aveline's continues. In addition, an independent production company based in Bristol, Plimsoll Productions are interested in making a documentary for Channel 4 on the story of Gough's Cave and Aveline's Hole. I have had a preliminary meeting with them recently and this appears to be a very worthwhile project.

Work done in our collection by Melissa Marr yielded some surprising carbon 14 results for two beaver specimens from Gough's Cave in our collection. Both dates were Younger Dryas in age. This is an exciting result as it's the oldest dated beaver in Britain and also infers that they survived the cold phase in Britain as opposed to retreating to Southern Europe. This work resulted in a paper in our *Proceedings* for 2016.

In response to a query from Mark Evans of Worcester University, work has started on scanning the barrow catalogue put together by EK Tratman. Half of the catalogue has now been scanned and made available. I'd like to thank Graham Mullan for his hard work on this.

An enquiry was received from Graeme Kirkham from the Cornwall Archeological Unit who is undertaking a project aimed at recovering new information on Bronze Age barrows in the wider Exmoor area by reappraising finds from old excavations currently held in museums and other institutions. The initial objective is to ascertain what is held and then, as a second step, to undertake specialist analyses of materials such as pottery, flint, human bone and charcoal, and to obtain radiocarbon dates. In 1949, a report by H Taylor and EE Taylor was published in the UBSS *Proceedings* on a cremation burial in sand dunes at Woolacombe, Devon, indicating that samples from the excavation had been kept and we were asked whether material from this excavation survived in the collection. The answer proved to be yes and, when found, it looked unlikely to have examined by anyone since it was placed in store in 1949! This was good news for the researchers as whilst they have material from the eastern fringes of Exmoor, they have very little from the west. This is a prime example of how material that has been in the collection for over 50 years can suddenly prove to be of vital importance to modern research and illustrates, yet again, the research impact of the material this society holds.

In addition to the above, research visits are pending from several other people, covering flints from King Arthur's Cave, flints from Picken's Hole, and human material from Backwell Cave. On the subject of Picken's Hole, Arthur ApSimon has transferred his document archive to the society and work is underway on the task of finally publishing the report on this site.

In another respect, 2017 proved to be an important year in the history of our collection. Those who are familiar with the museum will know that we have a display covering the important Iron Age site of Read's Cavern on Mendip and our cavers will no doubt be familiar with it, too. However, much of the material from Read's, including the famous horse hobbles and the tankard hoops, as well as various brooches and items of pottery, has been on loan to Woodspring Museum for the last 50 years or more and formed part of one of their permanent displays. They also had some pottery from Brean Down. I've known the UBSS museum since 1979 and the material had been on loan for several decades before I came to Bristol. However, in 2016, as part of a major refurbishment, Woodspring Museum closed and the material was transferred to the Somerset Museums Service. I'm delighted to report that all the loan material from Woodspring has now been returned to UBSS, and although they might wish to negotiate a further loan of the Brean material, the items from Read's will be remaining in our museum and we hope to be able to incorporate these in our own displays.

Allan Summerfield and I have held some preliminary discussions with Julie Reynolds of the South West Museum Service on whether we will embark on the process of endeavouring to have the UBSS museum accredited under the Arts Council scheme. Julie has helpfully

ascertained that our governance structure does meet the accreditation standards. The next step will be to work on a forward plan for the museum. These discussions are at an early stage but this is something we hope to be able to pursue when time allows, as this would be a positive step for the museum.

I'd like to end as I began, with thanks to Allan and Wendy. Their help and support has been invaluable and is very much appreciated.

Linda Wilson
Museum Curator