

News

The Director's view, 2024

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Story-telling

I recently wrote the obituary for one of my mentors, Graham Connah, a great field archaeologist and synthesist both in West Africa and Australia. Among Graham's last books was *Writing About Archaeology* (2010, Cambridge University Press). I must admit, it's a book that I did not think much about when it first appeared, but its theme corresponded with things I was thinking about over the summer, so I gave it – and some related texts – another look.

The subject I would like to consider, in this preamble to our year in review, is the archaeological narrative – story-telling. One example that I have used over the years is an arts-and-craft project from my youth on Galveston Island in the 1970s. I don't know whether you have ever seen anything similar, but I vividly remember, in those psychedelic and less health-and-safety-conscious days, a plank of wood (about 12 × 8 inches) with a number of nails hammered into it, along with a pile of multiple strands of coloured yarn. The idea was to create a colourful and perhaps meaningful pattern by choosing yarn to connect the different posts. My particular creation lived on my bookshelf for a few years. In my student days it struck me that archaeological interpretation is a bit like that. We have a certain number of fixed points – dates, distributions, counts – floating in a broad field with wide gaps, and, somehow, we must find ways to join them up into a coherent story. We can all choose to do it in different ways. But given the premise that we are all working with the same fixed points (putting critique of data itself to one side), what makes a good archaeological narrative? All things being equal, is an entertaining – and plausible – explanation automatically better than an equally plausible anodyne one?

Imagine my surprise when I later read Collingwood (1946, 242) and found:

A sequence of events or a past state of things, thus appears as a web of imaginative construction stretched between certain fixed points provided by the statements of ... authorities, and if these points are frequent enough and the threads spun from each constructed with due care, always by the *a priori* imagination and never by arbitrary fancy, the whole picture is constantly verified by appeal to these data, and runs little risk of losing touch with the reality it represents.

To this same end, Hodder (1992, 164) wrote that ‘material remains from the past are merely networks of resistance to our theories’ (shades of nails and yarn). Truly, there is nothing new under the sun. But questions about the basis and perspectives of such narrative ‘weaving’ remain an almost eternal conundrum for archaeological theory and practice. Another aspect of this question concerns the merits of good story-telling, or, in the words of Connah (2010, 64), to somehow write about ‘how people lived, rather than an artefact-punctuated time table’.

My trigger for thinking about this was a conversation that I had with a documentary film crew at Norton (Suffolk) this summer. I asked them why they had chosen our project for filming this year. They replied that I had presented a compelling narrative for the site, something often lacking from similar projects. I immediately thought (shades of David Byrne) ‘My God, what have I done?’ I quickly reviewed in my mind all my hypothetical constructs and weighed them against those of my colleagues – would my nails and string hold up? What had been an unconsciously assembled reconstructive pitch about Roman Norton, based on our finds, was now becoming all too ‘real’. I started thinking about story-telling, my years of collecting oral histories in Africa and of archaeologists as creators of new oral epics. Why do certain (non-sensational) constructions of the past – usually those incorporating people, dynamic explanations and speculative visualisations – ‘entertain’, and does that make them ‘better’?

In *The Nature of Historical Knowledge* (1986) Michael Stanford wrote that there are 10 modes of constructing histories (please bear with me):

- 1) The basic narrative – following a singular thread or ‘story’ over a chronology.
- 2) Descriptive history – exploring a single time-slice of social history.
- 3) Global history – a grand synthesis of comparative regional or world history, for a given era or eras.
- 4) Subject specific analytical – a multi-dimensional approach to a single subject (for example, early Christianity in northern Europe using text and archaeology).
- 5) Long-term comparative – between analyses between cultures.
- 6) Interpretive – reconsidering ‘what really happened’ for an event or era, re-interpreting the conventional narrative.
- 7) Empathetic – shades of Collingwood, trying to ‘think one’s way into the past’, ethnographies of past societies, what it was like to live in Roman London, or even archaeology interspersed with imagined, reconstructive novelisations in past settings.
- 8) Constructive – combining the empathetic approach with third-person evaluation of the evidence from a contemporary perspective.
- 9) Explanatory – like interpretive (6) but to revisit and clarify for the general public the history of a place and/or era.
- 10) Evaluative – making value judgements on the past in the interest of contemporary issues (for example, climate change, Brexit or ethnicity).

Of course, the archaeologist could add ‘site report’ and ‘material culture synthesis’ to all this, among other things. But, as Paul Courbin (1988) has written, when we put aside our site plans and artefact counts and start writing about the past as experienced, we are

largely doing so as a kind of historian (or anthropologist). How self-conscious are we that we are engaging with the different ‘modal’ choices Stanford puts before us for writing our archaeological stories? Or, in the notions of Connah (2010), how concerned are we that we are choosing from this palette in a creative and appealing way?

When I think of my work in Mali, there is another mode that could be added to Stanford’s list – multi-vocal histories. In working on pasts where deep time community memories and contested narratives come into play, the archaeologist must engage with those narratives, not as judge, but as negotiator (see MacDonald and Camara 2011; 2012). Here our story-telling becomes multi-vocal, and necessarily maintains dialogue and ambiguity. In historic periods the motivations and actions of persons and polities, as well as the ordering of arrivals and events, are particularly subject to dispute. Here we can connect with Rosemary Joyce, our Vere Gordon Childe Lecturer for 2023 and her book *The Language of Archaeology* (2002). Increasingly, narratives must enter into discussion with and cede narrative authority to non-academic historians, themselves specialists of the past in their own cultural context (in terms of my own research, here I think of griots and town elders). Joyce (2002, 132) suggests that we may choose to ‘tell multiple stories in multiple voices’ or alternatively ‘narrate in fragments’.

More broadly, Joyce (2002, 2, 122) writes that ‘the creation of narrative is a practice that literally binds the discipline of archaeology together’ and that ‘archaeologists enter into the terrain of writers of fiction, and take on the responsibility of the craft work involved’. One could argue that archaeologists are continually in the process of both creating and editing their stories. From talking with colleagues around a feature in a trench, to end-of-day discussions around pub tables, we are trying to reason out and negotiate the story that we will tell. This is further shaped by interface with archives and oral traditions, the consideration of landscapes, the scrutinising of dates and isotopic determinations. And we all individually spin our yarns from our fixed points as creative acts. I don’t pretend to have introduced anything new here, or to have suggested any solutions, but I do wish to draw the reader’s attention to our role as story-tellers, and to provoke some thought as to how we do it and why we do it, and whether as story-tellers we shouldn’t also give conscious consideration to entertaining our audience.

The year that was ... in the field

As the academic year begins, I have just returned from a summer of exhibit curation and fieldwork – the former in Louisiana for our upcoming Creole Origins museum exhibition in Louisiana and the latter our student fieldwork training project at Norton (Suffolk). The Norton season directed by Stuart Brookes and myself, with the aid of Murray Andrews as finds officer, ran for six weeks and produced fascinating results: a Roman well and water system, a Bronze Age village and foundations of part of a late Anglo-Saxon church (for the latter, see Andrews et al. 2024, in this issue). I spent much of my time in the ‘big pit’, which turned out to be a sunken platform for a 7-metre-deep well and a lime pit (see Figures 1 and 2). Artefacts were plentiful in the fill, including coins, pottery and well-preserved animal bone, especially cattle and pig.



Figure 1 The Director down a well – early days (Source: Charlotte Frearson)



Figure 2 The well, going down. Notice the charred timber braces in the corners, a round well in a square hole (Source: Charlotte Frearson)

Meanwhile, Kris Lockyear located and beautifully excavated a wooden Roman water pipe with iron link fittings, leading to a square tank (see Figure 3). Interpretively, Kris favours a brewery; a similar feature at nearby Ixworth was interpreted as a small water tower and water supply. All in all, a productive and entertaining dig for staff and students alike (see Figure 4).

Elsewhere, and a bit earlier, along with Andrew Mayfield (Community Archaeologist, Royal Parks), Stuart led our London ‘commuter dig’ for year-one undergraduates at Greenwich Park looking for a Roman road and exploring the landscape around the Roman Temple.

This academic year, we joined forces with the National Trust to excavate at Bodiam Castle (Sussex). This year’s dig is the start of a three-year project, #Bodiam100, exploring the castle’s sub-surface archaeology in the lead-up to its 100th anniversary in the care of the National Trust in 2026.¹

In other news, this year Archaeology South-East (ASE) turned 50. The Sussex Archaeological Field Unit, as it was then known, was established half a century ago, back in April 1974. ASE has always strived to bridge the much-debated divide between academic and commercial archaeology. Their anniversary year kicked off with a session at the Roman Archaeology Conference (see below), where ASE colleagues reflected on data from past excavations and explored new research in the region. As ASE continue their 50th anniversary celebrations, the ASE Director, Louise Rayner (2024), reflects on the origins and development of the unit later in this volume of *Archaeology International*.



Figure 3 Geophysics meets excavation – small cuts to recover the individual iron couplings of the Roman water pipe



Figure 4 Reaching the end in the ‘big pit’ – Manuel Arroyo-Kalin visits to take sediment samples from features

Promotions, new staff and leavers

I am pleased to announce the success of Borja Legarra-Herrero, Rhiannon Stevens and Yijie Zhuang in UCL’s senior academic, research and teaching promotions. Borja has been promoted to Associate Professor (Teaching), Rhiannon to Professor of Archaeological Science and Yijie to Professor of Chinese Archaeology and Geoarchaeology. All promotions took effect on 1 October 2024.²

This academic year we have also welcomed new permanent academic, research and teaching staff, including:

- Murray Andrews – part-time Lecturer in British Archaeology, who joined us from the University of Oslo’s Museum of Cultural History.
- Kate Fulcher – Lecturer in Conservation, who joined us from the University of Oxford’s Bodleian Libraries.
- Sara Perry – Associate Professor in Digital Public Archaeology joined us in June from MOLA, where she was one of the directors – this is a major new senior appointment!
- Faye Beesley was welcomed onto our professional services staff team, joining us as Assistant to Judy Medrington, our Academic Administrator.
- Saltanat Amirova – Research Assistant on the Arcadia-funded Central Asian Archaeological Landscapes phase 2 project led by Tim Williams and Gai Jorayev.

- Federica Cilio – Research Assistant, also on the Arcadia-funded Central Asian Archaeological Landscapes phase 2 project.
- Patrick Cuthbertson – Research Associate on the Arcadia-funded Central Asian Archaeological Landscapes phase 2 project.
- Henry McGhie – Research Assistant on the collaborative EC-funded ‘Petrocultures’ Intersections with the Cultural Heritage Sector in the Context of Green Transitions project led at the UCL Institute of Archaeology (IoA) by Rodney Harrison.
- Anna Simandiraki-Grimshaw on Sara Perry’s Transforming data rE-use in ARChAeology project, funded the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC).
- Viva Sacco – British Academy International Fellow who has joined us for three years to undertake her research on the Islamic Glaze Revolution: Artisans and Consumers in the Medieval Central Mediterranean, with Corisande Fenwick as mentor.
- Lisa Yeomans – a happy return of this IoA alumni as Research Fellow in Zooarchaeology on the Everyday Islam project with Corisande Fenwick, funded by the European Research Council (ERC).
- There are also new postdoc staff.

This academic year we also said goodbye to the following academic and research staff:

- Ian Freestone – Professor of Archaeological Materials and Technology who retired from his post after many years of dedicated service to the IoA.
- Barney Harris – Research Fellow on the Leverhulme Trust-funded Monumentality and Landscape: Linear Earthworks in Britain project led by Andrew Reynolds.
- Eloise Noc – Research Fellow on the Arcadia-funded Mapping Africa’s Endangered Archaeological Sites and Monuments project, led by me at the IoA.
- Caitlin O’Grady – Lecturer in Conservation, who moved back to the USA to take up the position of Assistant Professor in the Anthropology Department and the UCLA/Getty Program in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage.
- Ying Shields-Zhou – Research Technician on the Natural Environment Research Council-funded Archaeo-Zn project, led by Rhiannon Stevens.
- Kimberley Te Winkle – Research Fellow on the Arcadia-funded Central Asian Archaeological Landscapes phase 1 project, led by Tim Williams.
- Ona Vileikis – Research Fellow on the Arcadia-funded Central Asian Archaeological Landscapes phase 1 project.

The passing parade: recognition and awards

Institute staff, honorary associates, students and alumni, both individually and for specific projects, continue to be recognised through an impressive array of awards and esteem indicators, including significant media interest, leadership of national and international panels and publication awards.

First, an ‘all staff award’. I am pleased to announce that the Institute has again been ranked third in the world in the QS World University Rankings by Subject for 2024.³ We continue to maintain an unparalleled range of expertise and diverse activities – a selection

of our key achievements from the 2023–4 academic year is presented below, evidencing the breadth of our teaching, research and engagement with the wider world.

Laura Adlington was announced as the sixth winner of the Society of Glass Technology's Pilkington Award, named in honour of Sir Alistair Pilkington, the inventor of float glass. Laura was presented with the award at the jointly held 15th European Society of Glass Conference and the 15th International Conference on the Structure of Non-Crystalline Materials (held in July 2024 at Churchill College, Cambridge). This is the first time that the award has been given to a researcher in historic and archaeological glass.⁴

The journal article 'Re-thinking the "Green Revolution" in the Mediterranean world', co-authored by Corisande Fenwick, was awarded the *Antiquity* prize for 2024. The article was originally published in the August 2023 issue of *Antiquity* by a collaborative authorship team to whom congratulations are given. The article examines the archaeological evidence for the so-called 'Islamic Green Revolution' and the spread of new crops and agricultural practices in the medieval Mediterranean.⁵

Rodney Harrison was invited by the South Korean government this academic year to help launch a new national integrated natural and cultural heritage management system. While in South Korea, Rodney also spoke at events hosted by the UNESCO International Centre for Interpretation and Presentation of World Heritage Sites and National Intangible Cultural Heritage Centre. Rodney participated in an event at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Seoul to launch the Korean-language edition of his co-edited book *Reimagining Museums for Climate Action*.⁶

Nick Merriman (Honorary Professor of Practice, UCL) has been appointed as Chief executive of English Heritage.⁷

Theano Moussouri was invited to the University of Gothenburg to take up a Visiting Fellowship during November, allowing her to share her expertise in food heritage and its role in sustainable development through participating in ongoing research and training activities at the Department of Historical Studies, the Centre for Critical Heritage Studies and the Heritage Academy.⁸

David Wengrow was invited to take part in the Sydney Writers Festival in Australia in May. David, together with writer and farmer Bruce Pascoe, participated in a panel event to discuss how their respective work has transformed our understanding of human history.⁹ David's co-authored volume, *The Dawn of Everything*, was named this year as one of the inspirations for Francis Ford Coppola's new film, *Megalopolis*.¹⁰

Institute and ASE staff, including our Postgraduate Teaching Assistants, continue to be recognised for their outstanding contributions to the learning experience and success of our students, being nominated in the 2024 UCL Student Choice Awards. Congratulations especially to Claudia Naeser, who was shortlisted for the award for exceptional feedback, and to Lisa Daniel and Judy Medrington who were shortlisted for the award for amazing support staff.¹¹

Student and alumni news

Institute and ASE alumna Sakshi Surana won the award for Early Career Archaeologist 2023 at the CBA Archaeological Achievement Awards. The Early Career Archaeologist Award, sponsored by the Royal Archaeological Institute, aims to highlight the contribution

of an early career archaeologist. This could include contributions to archaeological work or research, dissemination or a wider contribution to the workplace or a project. The CBA panel commented that Sakshi is an ‘exceptional early career archaeologist who is demonstrating a tangible passion for archaeology through a commitment to her own professional development and the advancement of the discipline. Her enthusiasm has been energizing for the entire panel!’¹²

ASE continue to document the experiences of our BA Archaeology with a placement year students. This year, ASE was joined by Claire, Galahad, Solomon and Tasnima.¹³

Luna Silvestri (Institute alumna: MA in Cultural Heritage Studies, 2022–3) was awarded a Zibby Garnett Travel Fellowship to help broaden her understanding of conservation worldwide. The Zibby Garnett Travel Fellowship, a scholarship available to UCL students engaged in conservation as part of their research, allows them to travel to relevant countries of interest, studying regional heritage craft and conservation techniques, and to bring these skills back to the UK.¹⁴

Several of the Institute’s undergraduate and graduate diploma students were awarded departmental prizes for the 2023–4 academic session, both in specialist subject areas and for their outstanding contributions to the life and work of the Institute. Congratulations to them all.¹⁵

Our master’s students were also awarded departmental and faculty prizes for the 2022–3 academic session. Congratulations again.¹⁶

Major funding for new research

Clara Boulanger was awarded a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship for her project *Following the Fish: Using Ichthyoarchaeology to Study the Tempo and Geography of Human Dispersals through Island Southeast Asia* to be hosted by us from September 2024 for three years, with Rhiannon Stevens as mentor.

An IoA-based team, led by Rodney Harrison, has been awarded AHRC funding for capacity-building activities to support climate action in collections-based institutions in low and middle-income countries.¹⁷ Rodney is also part of a collaboration of 10 academic and cultural sector organisation partners in six countries who have won European Commission funding for the project ‘Petrocultures’ Intersections with the Cultural Heritage Sector in the Context of Green Transitions to research cultural heritage and climate change in the context of green transitions.¹⁸

Renata Peters has undertaken collaborative fieldwork in the Brazilian Amazon this academic year during her sabbatical as part of research funded by the Endangered Material Knowledge Programme (British Museum) for the project *Weaving Fibres of Resistance: Tikuna Tree Bark and Identity in the Amazon*. This new project – undertaken in collaboration with Edson Tosta Matarezio Filho (Universidade Estadual de Feira de Santana), with input from the Institute’s Digital Heritage photographer Antonio Reis – is investigating and documenting different aspects of the production of material culture and practices associated with the *Festa da Moça Nova* (Young Woman’s Festival), with a focus on the use of tree bark known as *tururi*.¹⁹

Miljana Radivojević was awarded an ERC consolidator grant (underwritten by the UK Research and Innovation funding guarantee) to investigate how and why Bronze Age

Eurasian Steppe communities created the first global economic network, c. 4,000 years ago. The DREAM project will take an original interdisciplinary approach to analyse Steppe metal production and plant debris, and to create and predict multi-layered datasets that will feed into high-resolution explanatory models for the evolution, organisation and environmental impact of Eurasian Steppe metallurgy in the context of Eurasian connectedness, delivering a paradigm shift in generating new knowledge of Eurasian (pre)history.²⁰

Johanna Zetterstrom-Sharp with a colleague at the University of Oxford was awarded an AHRC Curiosity Grant for their collaborative project *Milking It: Colonialism, Heritage and Everyday Engagement with Dairy*.

Broadcast media and public engagement

A new podcast series *Only Collections in the Building*, created by Heba Abd el Gawad and Johanna Zetterstrom-Sharp, was launched this year. The podcast series, produced by Maria Christodoulou, creator of the podcast *From Root to Vine*, forms part of the AHRC-funded project *Mobilising Collections for Institutional Change: Egypt at the Horniman*. All episodes are available on the Institute's Soundcloud account.²¹

Pauline Harding (IoA PhD student) was invited to contribute to the BBC Radio 3 *Free Thinking* programme, looking at approaches to death, including Viking burials, preserving archaeology in Uganda, the morgues of Paris and New York and the medieval attitude to dying. Pauline spoke about her current AHRC-funded PhD research on spirits and approaches to cultural heritage in Uganda.²²

Kevin C. MacDonald and Mark Altaweel have returned to the television series *Strangest Things* for its third season. Formerly of Discovery & Sky History, now acquired by National Geographic, this 'Animal, Vegetable and Mineral-like' programme has a group of experts hold forth on various contentious historic and archaeological 'mystery' objects. Filmed in summer 2024, series 3 will be aired in early in 2025.

Sada Mire was invited to participate in a Women's History Month special event, organised by Disney, in March 2024. Sada was interviewed on stage at Hammersmith Cinema in London by writer, broadcaster and biologist Aarathi Prasad, and presented her work to about 2,000 members of Disney staff (both in person and via livestream on Zoom).²³

Matthew Pope is working with Jersey Heritage on a new exhibition about Jersey's prehistoric past. The commitment that Jersey heritage shows to the protection, curation and interpretation of Jersey's past is exemplary and Matthew and colleagues are very proud to continue to play a part in supporting their inspirational work.²⁴

Miljana Radivojević was interviewed in May for an episode of *The Ancients* podcast on the origins of the Silk Road. The podcast for all ancient history fans is dedicated to discussing our distant past. Featuring interviews with historians and archaeologists, each episode covers a specific theme from antiquity.²⁵

Bill Sillar was invited to participate in the BBC Radio 4 programme *You're Dead to Me* on the Inca of South America.²⁶

The UCL- and AHRC-funded augmented reality experience *Ghosts of Solid Air* launched in October as part of the 67th BFI London Film Festival, coinciding with the start

of Black History Month. The project grew out of an AHRC-funded research fellowship undertaken by Colin Sterling at the Institute, titled *New Trajectories in Curatorial Experience Design* (2019–21). Following a period of research and development, Rodney Harrison and Colin (now University of Amsterdam) were awarded AHRC Follow-On Funding for Impact and Engagement to support the production of the project.²⁷

ASE archaeologist Stephen White was interviewed on BBC Radio London to discuss the exciting findings from excavations at the National Gallery. Stephen appeared on the Shay Kaur Grewal show in March. He talked about how ASE excavations revealed new evidence suggesting that the urban centre of Saxon London, known as Lundenwic, extended further west than previously thought. These planned excavations were undertaken before redevelopment as part of the National Gallery's bicentenary project, NG200.²⁸

'Neolithic Cannibals' – an immersive sound art installation that took inspiration from Whitehawk Neolithic Camp – was exhibited as part of the Brighton Festival in May. The exhibition was created by young people from Whitehawk and East Brighton and local sound artist Simon James, with the support of ASE archaeologist Jon Sygrave. It mixes archaeology, psycho-geography, sound art and activism to transport audiences to a place where imaginative and fantastical sounds will invite deep listening to an area that can often be considered hidden and unheard.²⁹

Johanna Zetterstrom-Sharp also contributed to the *Unlocking the SDGs: Blueprint for the Future* podcast series. This series, which brings together experts from across UCL and beyond to explore the SDGs, is hosted by Professor Priti Parikh (The Bartlett, UCL's School of Sustainable Construction) and Professor Monica Lakhanpaul (UCL Great Ormond Street Institute for Child Health).³⁰

Institute public events

As part of our commitment to provide an outstanding research environment for staff, students and visitors, the Institute hosts and organises numerous events on many different aspects of archaeology and is linked to other heritage institutions, archaeological societies and organisations.

University Archaeology Day (UAD) 2024 took place at the British Museum in July. This free annual event has been designed for prospective students, teachers and parents to learn about the many degree programmes on offer across the UK, to discover the huge range of career opportunities that an archaeology degree can lead to and to hear about some of the latest archaeological research. We look forward to UAD 2025.³¹

The Institute was also co-organiser this year of Current Archaeology Live! 2024, including the UK Archaeology Awards, in February. This event brings together hundreds of archaeological enthusiasts with a range of entertaining presenters and a room of book dealers, tour and field school organisers and educators. Research presentations by UCL staff were given by me ('Tumuli through time in Mali and Senegal') and Matthew Pope ('La Cotte de St Brelade and the archaeology of its last Neanderthals'). We will also co-organise the 2025 event, scheduled to take place on Saturday 1 March – details will be announced nearer the time.³²

The Institute hosted a Professorial Inaugural Lecture by Louise Martin this year. Inaugural lectures are an opportunity for our new professors to showcase their achievements and innovative research to a broad audience of members of UCL and the general public. Louise's presentation was titled 'Where the wild things were: People and animals in neolithic Anatolia and the Middle East'.³³

The Gordon Childe Lecture and Seminar 2024, which took place in May, was given by Professor Richard Bradley and was titled 'Hidden Valuables: Hidden Variables. Hoards and Other Deposits from the Mesolithic to Modern Times'. Richard's lecture is published in this issue of *Archaeology International* (see Bradley 2024). The annual Gordon Childe Lecture features speakers able to take a broad view of their topic and make it interesting and relevant to both the general public and subject specialists. The accompanying seminar offered an opportunity for extended discussion on the themes raised in the lecture.³⁴

The Term I IoA research seminars featured a public thematic series from January to March 2024, which was concerned with 'London Archaeology: Past, Present and the Future'.

The International Centre for Chinese Heritage and Archaeology continued its series of 'China Night' research seminars and organised a series of 20th anniversary public lectures including:

- Dame Jessica Rawson (University of Oxford) on 'China's Great Tombs: A New Route to the Past and to Recognising China Today' (October 2023)
- Professor Jianjun Mei (Needham Research Institute, and McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, University of Cambridge) on 'Sanxingdui Bronzes and Metallurgical Network in the Shang Dynasty' (January 2024)
- Professor Harriet Evans (University of Westminster/London School of Economics) and Professor Michael Rowlands (UCL) on 'Grassroots Values and Local Cultural Heritage in China' (March 2024)
- Dr Feng Li (School of Archaeology and Museology, Peking University) on 'Northern Dispersal of Early Modern Humans into East Asia: Progress and Prospect' (May 2024)
- Dr Xinyi Liu (Washington University in St Louis) on 'Understanding Ancient China' (May 2024).

The Sir David Wilson Lecture, the keynote event in the 2023–4 IoA/British Museum Medieval Seminar Series, was given by David Griffiths (University of Oxford) on 'New Perspectives on the Viking Age in the Northern Isles'. Other seminars included 'Crossing the Sea to England: Maritime Considerations of the Norman Invasion in 1066', 'Sealing the Deal: The Ballycotton Brooch in Muslim-Carolingian Relations', 'The Battle of Ringmere and Warfare in the Administrative Landscape of England's Late Viking Age' and 'Reflections on the Staffordshire Hoard: Glittering War-Gear from 7th Century AD Britain'.³⁵

The IAMS Beno Rothenberg Memorial Lecture 2024 was given by Marcos Martinon-Torres (Institute alumnus and Pitt-Rivers Professor of Archaeological Science, University of Cambridge) in March, titled 'Gold and Power ... to the People: The Archaeometallurgy of Collective Action'.³⁶

Conferences and symposia

Andrew Gardner was Chair of the Conference Organising Committee for the 15th Roman Archaeology Conference/32nd Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference (RAC/TRAC), hosted by UCL in April. RAC is the premier international conference devoted to Roman archaeology. It is organised by the Roman Society every two years in collaboration with a host institution. It was a mammoth task (thanks are given to all involved in its organisation) and was a very enjoyable event.³⁷

The Islamic Archaeology Research Network, led by Corisande Fenwick, co-organised the 8th Annual Islamic Archaeology Day, with colleagues in SOAS, in March. This has become the main event for Islamic archaeologists in the UK and beyond.³⁸

Our IoA PhD Student Conference 2024 on Innovative Ideas, Methodologies and Techniques was held in June, highlighting the latest in research by PhD researchers.³⁹

IoA/ASE 'in the news' this academic year

References to ancient Britain linked to hostility online

Collaborative research involving Mark Altaweel has found that references to ancient history online tended to be extreme and predominantly negative in tone.⁴⁰

Stonehenge's massive central Altar Stone, a gift from Scotland

A new analysis of Stonehenge's central six-tonne Altar Stone, undertaken by Rob Ixer (Honorary Senior Research Fellow) and collaborators, indicates that it has come from north-east Scotland.⁴¹

Stephen Shennan discusses decimation of Neolithic farmers 5,200 years ago

Writing in *The Conversation*, Stephen Shennan considers what may have caused the decimation of Neolithic farmers 5,200 years ago.⁴²

Largest known prehistoric rock engravings discovered in South America

A new study by an international team including Jose Oliver has revealed a series of ancient South American engravings thought to be the largest prehistoric rock art in the world.⁴³

Major ancient migration to Timor Island uncovered

Collaborative research led by Ceri Shipton indicates that humans first reached the island of Timor in large numbers, challenging previous understanding of how ancient people migrated from Southeast Asia to Australia.⁴⁴

Digital preservation of Welwyn Roman Baths

Kris Lockyear and Antonio Reis have created a digital 3D model of Welwyn Roman Baths to help preserve the archaeology on the site.⁴⁵

Mesopotamian bricks unveil the strength of Earth's ancient magnetic field

A study of Mesopotamian bricks, involving Mark Altaweel, has provided an important insight into the Earth's ancient magnetic field.⁴⁶

Rendlesham reveals a 1,400-year-old temple

A possible pre-Christian temple from the time of the East Anglian Kings, some 1,400 years ago, has been found at Rendlesham, near Sutton Hoo in Suffolk, by a team of archaeologists, including Institute researchers.⁴⁷

Heritage value of concrete skateboard parks

Patrick Quinn and Iain Borden (UCL Bartlett) published the first detailed academic paper on the heritage value of concrete skateboard parks left from the skating boom of the 1970s.⁴⁸

Conclusion

The new academic year finds us facing a wide range of 'challenges' (the new word for 'problems'), as the university sector deals with years of frozen undergraduate fees and fading overseas master's numbers. Despite this, we are looking at the largest undergraduate intake in the Institute's history. We will weather the storm and continue to supply more opportunities for our students. I look forward to presenting another briefing next year, with more tales from the field and achievements by our staff and alumni. In the meantime – stay creative!

Notes

- 1 <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology-south-east/news/2024/jun/ucl-archaeologists-joining-forces-national-trust-excavate-bodiam-castle>.
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