

Some highlights of the 2005/2006 academic year

Stephen Shennan

The Director of the Institute comments on developments since the eighth issue of Archaeology International was published.

Peter Ucko finished his last director's highlights column in *AI 2004/2005* by saying that he was sure I would find the job inspiring when I took over. I can confirm that he was 100 per cent correct. It is enormously exciting and inspiring, albeit somewhat intimidating, to be head of such a great organization with such an outstanding staff, not just on the academic side but also in the Institute's support roles. Needless to say, it is also incredibly busy. I can't believe how quickly the months since September 2005 have passed.

This has been a major year for staff changes, apart from Peter's retirement, with ten new academic staff joining the Institute: Joe Flatman (Lecturer in Maritime Archaeology), Andrew Gardner (Lecturer in the Archaeology of the Roman Empire, replacing Mark Hassall, who has retired), Theano Moussouri (Lecturer in Museum Studies, replacing Paulette McManus, who has retired), Julia Shaw (Lecturer in South Asian Archaeology), Ulrike Sommer (Lecturer in Prehistoric Archaeology), Dietrich Stout and Ignacio de la Torre (Lecturers in the Archaeology of Human Evolution), Jim Aimers (temporary lecturer, replacing Liz Graham while she is on her British Academy Research Readership), and James Steele (Reader), the new director of the AHRC Centre for the Evolution of Cultural Diversity (reported in *AI 2004/2005*, which started on 1 January 2006. Thanks to Peter Ucko's foresight in having so many new appointments approved in his last year as director, the Institute is in a strong position to cope with the challenges posed by UCL's financial problems and the cuts that are now being required. However, even in this climate, we will shortly be appointing a new lecturer in the archaeology of the Mediterranean in the First Millennium, to start next academic year. In other staff changes during the year, Nick Merriman, director of UCL Collections and Museums and also a member of the Institute, left to become director of Manchester Museum and was replaced by Sally MacDonald, previously manager of the Petrie Museum.

As usual, there have been major research awards to Institute staff since the last director's report. Ruth Whitehouse and Kathryn Lomas obtained a further three years' funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council for their work on the origins of literacy in Etruria and central Italy, and Kevin MacDonald received funding from the same source for his Cane River African Diaspora Archaeological Project, a collaborative project with the Louisiana Creole

Heritage Center and the Cultural Resource Office of Northwestern State University (Louisiana). Applications to the Leverhulme Trust for major three-year projects were also successful. Andrew Reynolds received funding for his project Beyond the Burghal Hidage: the Landscape Context of Anglo-Saxon Civil Defence; Martin Welch for his project Beyond the Tribal Hidage: Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms in Southern England AD 400–750; and Simon Hillson and Daniel Antoine for An Interdisciplinary Study of Human Growth in London over the Past 1500 years.

Field projects by members of the Institute in different parts of the world continue to be too numerous to mention (see p. 9), but three may be singled out. The first is the Los Buchillones Project in Cuba, directed by David Pendergast, an honorary research fellow of the Institute, and co-directed by his wife Liz Graham of the Institute. This has won Cuba's Premio Ciencias Sociales prize, awarded annually to projects that have made significant contributions in this field; it is the first time it has been awarded to an archaeological project. Two major projects that have just started are the Knossos Urban Landscape Project, directed by Todd Whitelaw, which began last summer and is the first-ever detailed multiperiod survey of this most famous of sites and its immediate surroundings; and the West Dean Archaeological Project, directed by Bill Sillar, investigating the long-term social use of the West Sussex downs. The project is being carried out in collaboration with the Institute's Field Archaeology Unit, together with West Dean College and the Edward James Estate, and will be the focus of the Institute's field-training activities for some years to come.

The Field Unit itself has been going through an exciting period of expansion under the leadership of its new director, Dominic Perring. It has continued to appoint new staff, to invest in new equipment, especially for modern electronic surveying and geophysics, and to widen its range of activities. In recognition of the shifting and expanding nature of these activities, it will become the Institute's Centre for Applied Archaeology next year.

The conferences organized by Institute members of staff have been almost as numerous as research projects, but I must draw attention to one of them here. Peter Ucko was very reluctant to have any event marking his retirement, but was persuaded to agree to a one-day conference on the subject "A future for archaeology: the past . . . in the present", in January this year, followed by dinner and a party. A remarkable

opening address by Thurstan Shaw, now in his 90s, was followed by a series of talks celebrating in different ways Peter's contribution to archaeology and especially to exploring the role of the past in the present. What Peter didn't know was that the conference title was also the title of a book of papers inspired by him, edited by Bob Layton (Durham), Peter Stone (Newcastle) and myself, which was presented to him at the conference, much to his amazement. For everyone present, the day was a very moving occasion.

Three other conferences give a flavour of the range of meetings held: "Framing plots: the grammar of ancient Near Eastern narratives" (December 2005) was funded as the winner of the first Institute of Archaeology Conference Competition; "Archaeology in the community" (June 2006), an initiative of Gabriel Moshenska, a new research student, was supported by the Institute and English Heritage, among others; and "Pattern and process in cultural evolution" (September 2005) was the final conference of the AHRC Centre for the Evolutionary Analysis of Cultural Behaviour.

No one will be surprised to learn that, since his retirement, Peter Ucko has not slowed down. He continues to direct the International Centre for Chinese Heritage and Archaeology (ICCHA), whose activities were greatly aided by the donation of £100,000 from Dr Simon Li, a retired judge in Hong Kong. The donation helped to fund a conference at Peking University in April 2006, jointly organized by the ICCHA and the School of Archaeology and Museology at Peking University, with the title "From concepts of the past to practical strategies: the teaching of archaeological field techniques".

One of the major challenges of the next couple of years for us and for the whole university community in Britain will be the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise, for which we have begun preparing. In this connection it is a pleasure to record the number of major books that members of Institute staff, especially some of the more junior ones, have published in the past year and which will certainly be influential in the years to come. Other challenges include UCL's financial concerns, already mentioned, and our forthcoming quality audit. It therefore seemed timely to organize an Institute "away day" to see where we are and where we should be going. This took place in May 2006, with the theme "Building on the past and shaping the future", and was attended by over 70 of the Institute's staff. The verdict was that we are in good shape but can't afford to stand still; constructive suggestions for change were made and these will be followed through in the year to come.