

# Archaeology News



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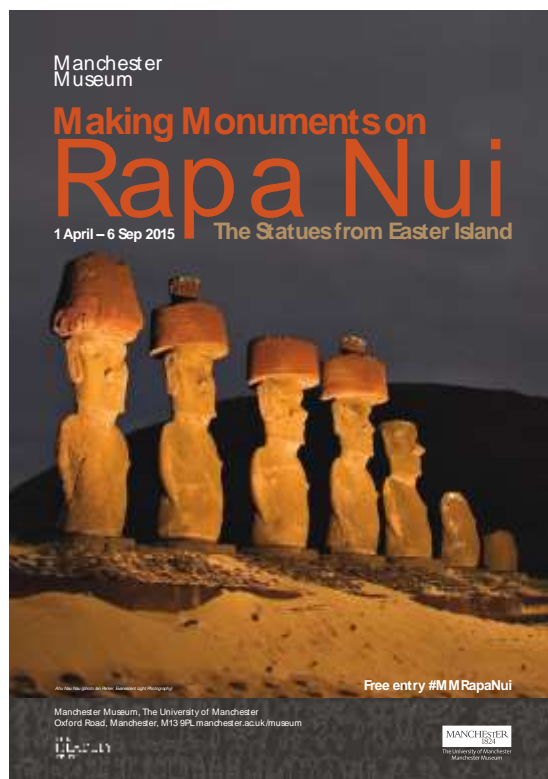
## Introduction

Dr Melanie Giles, Recruitment & Admissions  
 Professor Siân Jones, Postgraduate Director

Welcome to our Summer 2015 Newsletter! This magazine showcases the exciting research going on in the Archaeology department: run by staff, but involving undergraduates and postgraduates in fascinating new discoveries across the globe. From Easter Island to Ethiopia, and the Mediterranean islands to the Ardnarmurchan peninsula in Scotland, it will introduce you to some of the people who will teach you at Manchester and the contributions they are making to society through research. We also want to show you some of the work by our BA (Hons) graduates, and our PhD students, to fuel your own aspirations! We hope you will gain a sense of the friendly and inspiring atmosphere in our department, its commitment to supporting academic excellence in your studies, and its marvelous resources. Come and join us: *learning from the past, for the future.*

Above: Prof. Colin Richards' project on dolmens - Gwern Einon, N. Wales.  
 Right: A student on Prof. Julian Thomas' dig at Dorstone Hill, Herefordshire, makes a wonderful discovery of a Neolithic blade.





## The Archaeology of Easter Island (Prof Colin Richards)

In an exciting new exhibition at the Manchester Museum, Colin Richards celebrates the results of a 5 year project investigating the world-famous island of Rapa Nui, revealing a sacred landscape of monument making and marking

Funded by AHRC, this 5 year programme investigated the world-famous landscape of Rapa Nui – otherwise known as ‘Easter Island’. Inspired by work on the Neolithic monuments of the UK, Prof. Colin Richards has been working with colleagues and students from UCL and Bournemouth University, to investigate the origins of the statues’ hats – made of volcanic red scoria. The team discovered that the quarries focused on the volcanic craters which were seen as entry points into a supernatural or ancestral underworld, and whilst the carving of such stone may seem to us to be a craft or industrial practice, the team were able to suggest this was surrounded by ritual activity. Quarry faces had been carved to create ‘animate’ rock faces, complete with eyes: symbols which are also found on the bodies of the statues.

Top left: research on Rapa Nui.

Top middle and left: the Manchester Museum exhibition.

According to Colin Richards, this confronts us with a world-view very different to our own, in which not just people but objects and features in the natural world were also thought to be ‘alive’. His research draws on anthropology, alongside excavation and survey, to make sense of these discoveries.

The exhibition at the Manchester Museum (supported by the Headley Trust) tells the story of the project, and undergraduate students worked with Colin and the curators to recreate some of the huge statues and quarry face at Puna Pau.

Finds from the project, as well as the museum’s own collections, and the loan of Moai Hava from the British Museum (supported by a grant from the Dorset Foundation) create rich insights into the how these monuments were made and what they might mean.

The exhibition is a good example of how staff are committed to the public dissemination of research (some of which you will have found on your digs!) and how the degree at Manchester will also help prepare you for a career in museums and galleries.



‘Making Monuments on Rapa Nui: the stone statues from Easter Island’ exhibition at Manchester Museum, 1<sup>st</sup> April-6<sup>th</sup> September 2015





## Postgraduate student focus

Our PhD students play a central role in our Department, conducting cutting-edge research and pioneering new approaches to archaeological and ancient historical research. They also teach undergraduate seminars and help run our research seminars. Here, Jennifer Chow tells us how an MA in Museum Studies led to a conservation experiment on a rare fragment of the Mary Rose.

I came to Manchester to study for an MA in Museums and Galleries studies, building on my studies in Maritime Archaeology. This has led to the unique Ph.D. opportunity to study a fragment of the internationally famous 'Mary Rose': a Tudor war-ship, commissioned by Henry VIII, which after a successful 34 years of service sank on the 19<sup>th</sup> of July 1545. Whilst the main vessel is being conserved by the Mary Rose Trust in Portsmouth, I have been entrusted with a small fragment from the ship, in order to trial a new 'passive' conservation technique.

The idea is simple: archaeologists often spend a huge amount of time – and money! – conserving waterlogged wood. Recovering timber from a maritime context has the additional problems of marine borer infestations and salinity to deal with. Even after this long process, the results can be rather 'dry', removing some of the mystery and awe of seeing the wood under water. My Ph.D. suggests that we can successfully conserve and display small fragments of wood in a water tank, resulting in less chemical intervention. It would allow museums to quickly display new finds, in a safe, temperature-controlled environment, which is expected to be highly attractive.

The Archaeology department's labs and technical expertise have been invaluable, but I have also been working with experts from the Engineering department to design the tank. One of the skills I've learned at Manchester is how to promote my research - I've successfully applied for funding from the Honor Frost Foundation to partially fund this project.

Main image: The tank, currently under analysis in the Archaeology department Research Laboratory.

I will be using our own staff and students to evaluate the impact of the tank but the research doesn't end there – I've also been travelling across museums in the UK, interviewing curators and wood specialists about their ways in which other famous vessels and artefacts have been conserved and displayed in the past. My Ph.D. will give experts a rich insight into the different conservation philosophies and practices employed in contemporary archaeology, whilst – I hope – offering them a new technical solution to some of their problems.

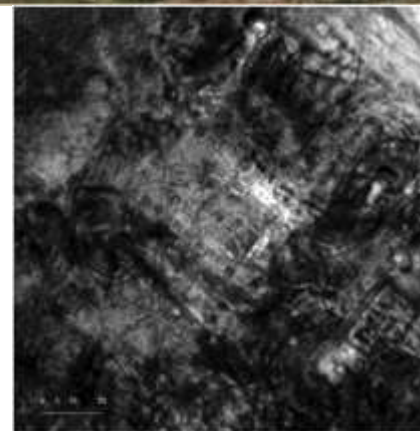


Above: ESEM picture of a wood fibre from the Mary Rose specimen being studied



## Heritage in crisis - archaeology in Iraq and the value of the past

Prof Stuart Campbell heads up a team from Manchester University: making significant new discoveries in Iraq, despite attempts by Islamic State militants to destroy the cultural heritage of this country. Exploring the ruins of Tell Khaiber, they have found vital new clues about the ancient Babylonian society that thrived here. The project has been working to train a new generation of archaeologists, as well as local schoolteachers, to ensure the future of this internationally important 'cradle' of civilization.



The Manchester team has just returned from three months of fieldwork. During the team's time in Iraq, Islamic State militants destroyed ruins at the ancient Assyrian capital of Nineveh as well as wrecked museum artefacts in Mosul. But despite this, the archaeologists continued to work at Tell Khaiber: close to the ancient city of Ur, where Sir Leonard Woolley discovered the fabulous 'Royal Tombs' in the 1920s. The team, directed by Professor Stuart Campbell, Dr Jane Moon and Dr Robert Killick from Manchester, described their Iraqi colleagues as resourceful, innovative and resilient, even when times were bad.

"Everyone is quite rightly expressing outrage at the destruction in and around Mosul. The sad fact is, there is very little one can do to prevent deliberate vandalism by well-armed fanatics. But if the militants think they can 'erase history' we are helping to make sure that can't happen: it is the information that is important and not the objects. Our project is actually doing something positive for the Iraqis, and that is appreciated," Dr Moon said.

In the course of their fieldwork this year the archaeologists discovered, among other things, 50 new documents, written in Babylonian, and found evidence for a scribal school operating from a public building which is the size of a football pitch! Stuart Campbell believes this was an administrative complex serving a capital city of the Babylonian empire, during the 'Dark Age' following the fall of Babylon and the disintegration of Hammurabi's empire. Yet this evidence shows it was a period of sophisticated

administrative mechanisms and large-scale distribution of grain and other commodities. Before returning to the UK, the archaeologists deposited 300 new artefacts in the Iraq Museum and set up a temporary exhibition in Baghdad as visiting universities that teach, or are planning to teach, archaeology. Find out more by visiting:

[www.facebook.com/tellkhaiber](http://www.facebook.com/tellkhaiber)



Above right: the site of Tell Khaiber under excavation.

Top right: a satellite image reveals the massive scale of this administrative complex.

Right: Clay seals, writing tablets and vessels from the site.



## The Neolithic of western Britain

One of Manchester's key research strengths is a specialism in British prehistory, complementing international expertise in the Mediterranean and Near East, as well as Australia and the Pacific.

Here, two of our colleagues report on their latest research into monuments built during this period: the dolmens of Wales and Ireland, and the enigmatic earth and timber monuments of Dorstone Hill, Herefordshire.

The Dolmens of Wales capture the public imagination as well as archaeological interest. In a project funded by the British Academy, Prof Colin Richards (with Dr Vicki Cummings from UCLAN) are investigating the earliest monuments to be built in the Neolithic period, between 4000-3600 BC: just as agriculture arrived in these islands.

With massive capstones weighing up to 160 tons, supported by slender orthostats, some of these monuments seem to hang in the air. The project is challenging the notion that these structures were once covered by earthen mounds – suggesting instead that they were impressively set on stone platforms as arenas for activity, some involving burial rites.

The capstones are often flaked and worked, to create massive monuments that appeared to defy gravity: suspending impressive stones above the heads of the living, in acts of construction which altered perceptions of the material world. This summer, research moves to Ireland to compare monument construction traditions across the Irish Sea.

Top middle: Dolmens at Pentre Ifan and Carrickglass.



The excavations at Dorstone Hill, Herefordshire, deal with a very different kind of monumentality. Located between the Golden Valley and the Wye Valley, Prof Julian Thomas has been working with local archaeologist Dr Keith Ray, to investigate an impressive hilltop, apparently cut off by a huge Neolithic bank.

As the team began to excavate this massive architectural feature, they discovered it consisted of three earthen mounds laid end-to-end, primarily composed of burned timber and clay. Stakeholes and postholes under these structures may represent the original foundations of timber Neolithic houses, pre-dating these structures. They had been burned and sealed with further clay deposits and a spread of stones. One mound was revetted in timber whilst another was supported with a stone wall. Stone buttresses were also used to shore up the mounds, resembling the drystone bays found in nearby Cotswold-Severn tombs. One of these consisted of an impressive set of orthostats, sadly disturbed during Second world war-era ploughing of the site.

Timber and stone chambers appear to have been inserted into these mounds, as well as later pits – one of which contained a flint axe and a fine, flaked knife. Another flint axe had been carefully laid in the forecourt outside one of the mounds.

Excavations this year will focus on the enigmatic postholes under the structure of the western mound. Yet the team this year will be slightly different: enriched by the presence of two young people with learning disabilities, from Rochdale, as part of their bid to achieve their 'Gold' Duke of Edinburgh Awards. Working with 'Pure Innovations' the Dorstone Project builds on department initiatives such as Whitworth Park (featured in the previous year's newsletter) to work with disadvantaged members of the community: using archaeology as an educational tool which facilitates inclusivity. Funding from the NHS Heywood, Middlewood and Rochdale Clinical Commissioning Group's Social Investment Fund, has made this possible.



Above: Dorstone Hill, Herefordshire, from the air, and two polished stone axes from the site.



## Undergraduate student in focus

Dr Melanie Giles reflects on working with BA (Hons) student, Paul Henry, on his undergraduate thesis about the Kirkburn sword.

Over the last year, I have been delighted to supervise the undergraduate BA (Hons) in Archaeology Dissertation by Paul Henry – one of our enthusiastic mature students. Paul was interested in weaponry from the start of his degree: a passion I share! Through courses on European Prehistory, he became fascinated with the idea of reconstructing one of the greatest examples of Iron Age craft skill in the UK – the Kirkburn sword.

At Manchester we encourage a 'hands-on' approach to the past, and whilst this was an unusual proposal for a dissertation, we firmly believe that students should create projects of true research value, which enhance the public's appreciation of the past. Paul worked with a talented sword-smith, Graham Hanley, to analyse how the iron sword, and its marvellous bronze-and-iron scabbard (decorated with La Tène artwork and red glass 'enamel'), had been made. They used reports from Dr Ian Stead's excavations of the burial and the British Museum's analysis of the sword, to fashion a replica.

Paul's thesis reported on the ethnography of this complex crafting of a composite object – something that has never been published in experimental archaeology before. He tested its strength, the manner in which it might be wielded, and also how it was worn. As the External Examiners noted at our exam board, Paul's thesis was a first class piece of research, which showcased the innovative and vocational approach that Manchester students bring to the past.

Left: the replica Kirkburn sword.



The Acklam sword, excavated by John Dent in the 1980s, and conserved as part of the current AHRC project, by the York Archaeological Trust (© YAT)

My interest in Paul's study comes from a life-long fascination with Iron Age 'warriors'. In my current research, I am investigating people buried with weapons in the Iron Age: seeking to understand whether these objects were merely the trappings of a wealthy elite, or if such people bore the signs of having fought in their life – were they actually Iron Age 'warriors'?

The results are fascinating. Burials with weapons are rare – strange for a 'Celtic' population renowned for their love of violence! Many of those interred with swords, spears, daggers or shields (and rare examples of helmets or even chainmail) show no evidence of wounds, nor do they appear to have died violently... but these are largely skeletal remains – no 'flesh wounds' survive – so we must be cautious. Yet the performance involved in many of these burials challenges us to rethink the symbolic power of weapons in the Iron Age world, and why they were included in the graves of certain individuals – projecting an image of martial strength in death. Other individuals have indeed 'died by the sword' – one of these is the 'Acklam warrior', buried with a sword bent in half: the subject of a current project funded by the AHRC. Paul's fascinating insights into such weapons will feature in the final write-up of this work, as a rich example of synergy between staff and student research.

## Harar - the most important Islamic centre in NE Africa

Prof Tim Insoll has spent the last couple of years investigating the origins of this centre of Muslim learning, which also played a pivotal role in trade routes between the coast of northern Somaliland and the highlands of Ethiopia.



Begun in 2013, this project focuses upon the city of Harar in eastern Ethiopia. Harar is the most important Islamic centre in northeast Africa, with approximately 82 mosques and over 100 saints' tombs and shrines found within the city wall, the jugal. Particularly in the 16<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries it was a place of Muslim learning and a focus of trade routes. The origins of the city, however, are obscure, with traditions giving foundation dates variously of the 7<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and mid-16<sup>th</sup> centuries AD.

Harar had been completely neglected by archaeologists: this project has revolutionized the impact our discipline can make in this region. Excavations have ranged from the important trade centre of Harlaa, close to Dire Dawa, with its monumental stone architecture and trade goods such as glass and semi-precious carnelian stone beads. Also the abandoned stonewalled settlement of Ganda Harla, linked with the mythical Harla people, and at Tulu-Korefta near Koromi, the site of a village very like those of highland Yemen, and connected with the Argobba ethno-linguistic group. A pre-Islamic burial mound is also being excavated to obtain a pottery

assemblage to compare with those from the Islamic sites and to examine changes in burial practices following Islamisation.

This research helps us to understand the origins and importance of Harar, and its relationship with surrounding settlements. Importantly, the project is being completed in partnership with the Ethiopian Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage – fostering an appropriate synergy between partners in international research.

Above: view of Koromi village

For more information on the project, as well as other research and publications by Tim Insoll, see:

<http://insoll.org.uk>



Above left: Excavation of the burial mound in progress

Above right: Prof Tim Insoll surveying a highland site in eastern Ethiopia, with colleagues





## Find out more about studying Archaeology at Manchester

### Undergraduate Programmes:

BA in Archaeology

BA in Archaeology and Anthropology

BA in Ancient History and Archaeology

Email: [ug-archae@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:ug-archae@manchester.ac.uk)

<http://www.alc.manchester.ac.uk/subjects/archaeology/undergraduate/>

### Postgraduate Programmes:

MA in Archaeology

MPhil in Archaeology

PhD in Archaeology

Email: [masalc@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:masalc@manchester.ac.uk)

<http://www.alc.manchester.ac.uk/subjects/archaeology/postgraduate/taught/>

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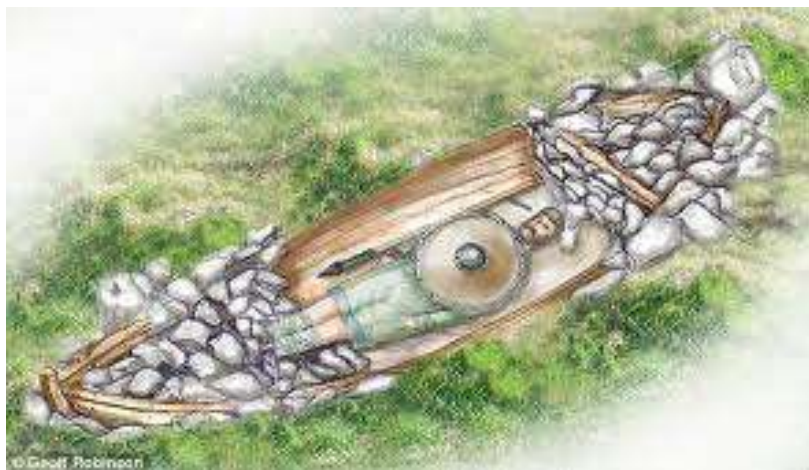
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Above: the visualization of the Viking boat burial at Ardnamurchan, produced by one of our second year BA (Hons) students, based on the sketch by Sarah Paris, and used in extensive BBC global publicity – see where your skills might take you!