

SECRETARIES' REPORT

MARCH 2017– MARCH 2018

Caving

The student cavers within the UBSS have been on many successful weekend trips throughout the past year. A small cohort went to North Wales in late March for a weekend exploring Croesor Rhosydd and other mines. A day of over-ground training with Mendip Cave rescue in May taught a mixed group of students and non-students some valuable first aid and rescue procedures in preparation for both UK trips and those going to Austria on expedition in the summer. There were two joint trips with CUCC in Otter Hole to finish the academic year.

Both Welcome weekends proved very popular with more than 20 new cavers joining the club. Bonfire night at the UBSS hut was popular as always with plenty of lamb and a small amount of caving! A large UBSS contingent went up to the CHECC forum in Yorkshire where everyone got involved with all aspects of CHECC: training, socialising and caving! For many, this was their first taste of SRT underground and despite the freezing weather, we had some very successful trips down Yordas and Jingling Pot. On top of this, a recent trip to Yorkshire and two trips to South Wales have seen us underground on a regular basis.

Caving abroad

Further afield, several members of the Society have attended a variety of expeditions. These have included the Cambridge University Caving Club's Austrian expedition to the Loser plateau, a CUCC trip to the Ardeche Gorge, France and our own expedition to Co Clare, Ireland. In Austria, members of UBSS intensively explored Guten Morgen Höhle (close to Organhöhle previously explored by UBSS in the 1980/90s) by means of a remote camp. Society members also contributed to the ongoing exploration of Tunnockssacht.

In Ireland, a decent amount of surveying was carried out. Work in the Coolagh River Cave was very productive. One team focused on extending the new survey deeper into the cave down the main drain. The second team worked on tidying up several sections, and extending the West Series. 1790 m of cave was surveyed, bringing the current work-in-progress total to 3355 m. A small amount of work was done in Cullaun One but there is still some left to do on future trips. The society is very grateful for the grant from the Tratman Fund to enable continued expeditions to Ireland. Progress has been made on the new Irish guide book, thanks to some hard work by Linda Wilson and Tony Boycott.

Other

Many thanks to the Alumni Foundation for the grant they gave us to install a pair of wire cages below the union, to facilitate drying and cleaning of equipment after trips. This has proved invaluable to us as it enables the rapid return of kit outside of union opening hours and allows both personal and club equipment to be cared for better.

On behalf of the students, we give our thanks to the Union for allowing us to continue SRT training in the Richmond Building, and to all those who worked hard to reinstate this facility for us over recent years. The regular use of the Richmond Building for SRT training enabled us to train a group of freshers in time for CHECC to enable them to get the most out of it.

Many thanks to the Alumni Foundation, the Tratman Fund of the University of Bristol and the Trustees of the Oliver Lloyd Memorial Fund for their continued financial support in the past year.

Ashley Gregg and Helen Frawley

MUSEUM REPORT, 2018

Yet again, it's been an exceptionally a busy year in the museum. I'd like to start by saying thanks to Allan Summerfield and Wendy Russ, who both graduated this year with degrees in archaeology. They have devoted a huge amount of time and energy to working in the museum and assisting with research visits and as ever it's been a pleasure to work with them. We have also had help this year from undergraduate caver and archaeologist Klaudia Pyc, so thanks as well to her.

Enquiries have been received from myriad diverse sources in the past year. We were contacted by an MA archaeology student at the University of Exeter, researching flint in Early Bronze Age funerary contexts for his dissertation UBSS collections include artefacts from barrows on the Mendip Hills, in particular the Beaker period deposits. Also, on the subject of flint, Tom Elliott, a postgraduate researcher at the University of Worcester, has carried out laser-ablation work on the microliths from King Arthur's Cave as part of his work on the Mesolithic lithics of Herefordshire. Tom is looking to characterise the range of flint colours and 'types', to examine if these correspond to different sources of the material.

Emily Wiesendanger, a PhD Research Student from the Centre for Quaternary Research at Royal Holloway, London, is researching Late Pleistocene reindeer in Britain and western Europe. She has looked at material from Brean Down, Picken's Hole and King Arthur's Cave. Allan and Wendy supervised and assisted with this research visit and Emily is hoping to shortly return to the museum for another day.

One of the society's early excavations took place at Mill Tut, a Bronze Age round barrow in Badock's Wood in Southmead. I had always presumed that the few finds from the site had been destroyed in the Blitz, but as part of Allan's conservation work on the barrow material, I discovered that the Mill Tut finds survived the war and are alive and well in the museum. I took them to the AGM of the Friends of Badock's Wood earlier this year, as part of a talk on the history of the woods, where they were greeted with great enthusiasm by a packed audience.

Sammy Field, a PhD researcher at the University of Southampton was interested in skeletal remains and their dentition, particularly from juvenile individuals, dating from the Neolithic to the Iron Age. She visited the museum to look at human material from Backwell Cave. On the subject of human remains, Allan, Wendy and I went on a Curating Human Remains In Museums Training Day at the MShed organized by the Human Remains Subject Specialist Network in conjunction with Bristol Museum. This was informative and a lot of fun!

Human remains have always been important to the society. Those from Aveline's Hole led to the formation of the UBSS 99 years ago. Work on this important collection continues. A NERC funding application from a joint project group led by Rick Schulting was successful and we have obtained a total of 11 new dates. We hope to be able to report on this in time for the centenary. Popular interest in Aveline's remain high as well, and I spent several days working with Plimsoll Productions, an independent film company, who were looking at early man in the region for a film commissioned by Channel 4. This was recently shown under the title 'The First Brit'. As often happens with TV work, several days' work boiled down to a brief shot of Rick in the museum, as the new DNA work on Cheddar Man ended up being the focus of the programme. The help of the society featured in the end credits, and I'd like to thank Plimsoll Productions for their very generous donation to the work of the museum and for funding the scanning of the Aveline's photo album. Helen Frawley and Tony Boycott helped with photography work at the cave.

At long last, work on the Picken's Hole excavation now seems to be coming to an end and it is hoped that the next issue of *Proceedings* will carry the specialist reports on this site. As part of this work, Allan and Wendy have researched and reported on Scragg's Hole, a Roman site which is on the same hillside and has frequently been confused with Picken's. The late Willie Stanton excavated here in the 1940s, but the site has not been fully published as yet.

Once the Picken's Hole excavation has been published, that will leave the society with only one major unpublished excavation, that of the Bronze Age barrow known as T5, almost opposite the UBSS Hut, dug in the 1950s by Herbert Taylor and others. A project group of Allen and myself, working with Jodie Lewis and Mark Evans (from the University of Worcester), hope to have a preliminary report on the museum archive ready in time for the centenary. And talking of the centenary, work has started on scanning objects for a possible digital project on the history of the society. Thanks are due to Andrew Atkinson on his hard work on this.

A curious piece of detective work has taken place this year by Roy Vbranch on material from Lime Kiln quarry on Mendip, excavated sporadically from the 1970s onwards. References to the material had a UBSS accession number, but there was no catalogue for the finds and no sign of them in the museum. Thanks to work by Roy, these have been tracked down to the Natural History Museum, to which it appears they were sent for examination by Professor Tratman shortly before his death in 1978. With help from Dr Roula Pappa at the NHM, the material is being made ready for transportation to Daniele Shreve at Royal Holloway, for further work on this by her and Roy, for eventual publication and return to the society.

My predecessor as museum curator, Christopher Hawkes, has been honoured by the University for his generous legacy to the Society. His name is now in the new Memorial Garden in the grounds of Royal Fort House along with alumni and other friends of the university who have left gifts in their wills. Graham and I were proud to represent Christopher's family and friends at the opening, and several of them have been able to visit the memorial. It's a lovely spot, so do take a look if you're ever passing by.

I have attended the meetings of the University of Bristol's Curators' Group meetings, an informal grouping of various curators that allows us to share best practice and stay up to date with each others' work. Thanks to Jo Ellsworth, Director of the Theatre Collection who convenes the group.

I would like to thank Dr Martin Crossley-Evans for his generous donation of books and periodicals to the library and museum. Martin retired earlier this year from the University after many years. He has made a massive contribution to the university over many years and he will be very much missed by all who know him. We wish him all the very best in his retirement.

And last, but certainly not least, this year's Random Enquiry Prize goes to the one about the distribution of the Dalmatian pelican in NW Europe during the Holocene! Sadly we didn't have any, but this shows that the life of a museum curator is anything but dull. There will be a prize for anyone who knew the Dalmatian pelican even existed. I certainly didn't but would now like to meet one, or its properly curated remains!

Linda Wilson
Museum Curator