

SECRETARIES' REPORT

MARCH 2019 – MARCH 2020

A lot has been going on in UBSS since this time last year. Soon after exams finished, we hosted a social at the hut, inviting other outdoors societies out to Mendip to partake in an evening of fire and partying! The idea was to increase our numbers from the other clubs. Unfortunately, we ended up clashing on dates with other societies, and so had a 100% UBSS turnout, nevertheless I am assured that the new social secretaries are to put this right for this summer!

The hut renovations have continued in the past year, with even more radiators being installed in an attempt to tame the fierce back boiler on the new stove. With all the underberbed heating now available it's a wonder that the hut hasn't been re-branded as a sauna.

This year we decided on a "vigorous freshers programme" in order to increase the number of new cavers coming into the club. This involved, among other events, the traditional chilli night, a 'cowstails (pub) crawl' around Bristol, and a pub orienteering exercise. These events proved a great success, with large turnouts.

This was swiftly followed by weekends to the Hut and to South Wales, to show the freshers what it's all about! Somewhat surprisingly, even Pierre's Pot as a first trip didn't seem to put them off.

With the promise of a joint trip with Durham to Yorkshire at Christmas, SRT training, fronted by Rosie Daniels, started in full force in the Students' Union. The commitment shown by Rosie, Sioned Haughton, Haydon Saunders and others in training people so they could go to Yorkshire has been admirable, with plenty of people enjoying their first vertical caving experience on this trip, even if most of us did abandon all plans of caving on the Sunday when we were snowed in – chips at the pub was a much more attractive idea.

Since Christmas there has been a lot of midweek caving on Mendip, with the hut getting plenty of use too. There was an end of exams weekend at the hut as well, coinciding with Burns Night and of course plenty of whisky. Following the caving we were all brown and resembled the Haggis. Since then we have had trips to Yorkshire and Mendip again, with another trip to South Wales is planned for after Easter.

There is another trip to Ireland planned for the summer, intending to continue the surveying work which has contributed so much to the new book *The Caves of Mid-West Ireland* which was launched at the Centenary Symposium in November. This weekend, organised by Linda Wilson, Gina Moseley, David Richards and Andy Farrant, was an excellent event with an impressive attendance reaching 100, a fitting number. The weekend started with a social event in the Stables on Friday night, was followed by a whole day of lectures on the Saturday then finished with field trips on Sunday. It was a particularly nice opportunity for different generations of the Society to get to know each other.

At the start of this year it was decided to co-opt several the new members onto committee to enable the students to have a greater say in where we go and what we do as a club. Most, if not all, of these members are now standing for re-election onto the committee. It is with sadness that I am going to have to give up the position of Hon. Secretary for the next year as I will be away from Bristol on placement.

The Society would like to extend its thanks to the Trustees of the Oliver Lloyd Memorial Fund for the generous grant towards restocking the tackle store, the Hut renovations and the publication costs of *Proceedings*. We are also grateful to the Students' Union for continuing to allow us the use of the stairwell for training purposes.

Henry Morgan

MUSEUM REPORT – 2020

As ever, the past year has proved to be a busy one in the museum. 2019 was the Society's Centenary year and even after so long, our collections are still a focus of intensive research in a wide variety of areas.

In April 2019, I was approached by Adele Brickling, a PhD student at Cardiff University, researching Iron Age mortuary practices in south-west Britain under the supervision of Richard Madgwick and Niall Sharples. As part of her investigation into funerary rites, she is using thin section light microscopic analysis of bone diagenesis from human remains in various states of completeness deposited in various features. As Adele explained: "This regional study will identify patterns in mortuary practice afforded to the different classes of human bone throughout south-west Britain. The project also incorporates a comprehensive secondary analysis of Iron Age burial data for south-west Britain. Together, a more holistic reconstruction of Iron Age mortuary practices in this region will be achieved." As part of this study, Adele spent several days in the museum sampling human remains from Backwell Bone Cave. Later in the year, Adele won the prize for the best student poster for her presentation on her work at the Centenary Symposium held in the Department of Geography.

Some years ago, Lucy Flower did a considerable amount of work on wolf bones in the UBSS collection as part of her PhD. She is now working at Royal Holloway and last year two of her students, Tim Pearson and Olivia Lozides following in her footsteps and carried out work with us for their Masters dissertations. Tim worked on specimens of bone, teeth, and flint tools from Rhinoceros Hole, examining them to ascertain/confirm species and record any other features such as gnawing, burning or cut-marks while Olivia was looking at potential ecological changes from Devensian to Holocene in dental and cranial material in red foxes. They each spent five days working in the museum, and I am grateful for the time Allan Summerfield spent helping with the supervision of their visit.

Charles Day from University College London, researching for his Masters based at the Natural History Museum in London was examining the changing frequency of labial striations from the Upper Palaeolithic through the Mesolithic into the Neolithic and one of the sites he used that has shown good evidence of this cultural dental wear, was Aveline's Hole. However, the Natural History Museum only has a very small sample of the human remains found in this cave so Charles visited our museum to spend time with the large assemblage held by the Society. Charles was primarily checking the frequency of labial striations on Upper Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic hominins to measure their decrease and/or determine that this paradigm is the result of poor reporting. Based on the direction of the striations he was intending to see if the handedness can be determined and compare it to handedness of other hominins which currently stands as 9:1 right to left-handed.

The material from Little Solsbury Iron Age hillfort near Bath still holds interest for researchers and Owen Kearns, a PhD student from Bournemouth University, studying the Roman Baths at Bath, visited to examine the Iron Age ceramic assemblage from this site.

An extensive area of research last year concerned work by Fiona Holloran from University College London on material from Picken's Hole. Fiona's PhD work, under the supervision of Rhiannon Stevens, is providing a landscape reconstruction of south-west Britain using published and novel data. At Picken's Hole she used Kate Scott's (2018) published faunal identification data alongside a novel biomolecular technique known as ZooMS to identify morphologically unidentifiable skeletal faunal remains. As Fiona stated in an article for the UBSS monthly newsletter earlier this year: "This project will increase the available faunal data for this late middle Palaeolithic site and allow investigation of the impact of fragmentation

on species representation at British Palaeolithic cave sites, with the ultimate goal of building a more detailed analysis of species representation and implications for the fluctuating environment of the late middle Palaeolithic in Britain. It is hoped that I will also conduct stable isotope analysis to further investigate environmental factors of the local landscape. The Picken's Hole data will be compared with two other Palaeolithic cave sites in south-west Britain to explore human presence through time and across a changing landscape." Fiona worked on a vast amount of material from Unit 3 at Picken's Hole and Arthur ApSimon who dug there and worked on the material for many years would have been absolutely delighted to see numerous boxes of unidentified and unidentifiable bone scrap return from the loan all individually sampled, bagged and tagged. Unlike many other collections, the UBSS museum has always maintained a policy of keeping its bone scrap, and with the new ZooMS technique now able to provide an identification of the various species, this proves the value of such material, if proof was ever needed. Having carried these boxes through several museum moves, I was absolutely delighted by this work and only wished that Arthur and my immediate predecessor Christopher Hawkes had lived to see this work. They would have loved it. Rhiannon also talked about this work at the UBSS Centenary Symposium in November.

One of our centenary projects over the past year has been the oral history project, *Travels Beneath the Earth*, led by Dr Andy Flack from the Department of History. Andy and I worked closely with two interns, Lena Ferriday and Nick Stromberg, funded by grants from the Oliver Lloyd Memorial Fund and the British Cave Research Association. Between us all, we interviewed various members of the society, including Desmond Donovan, then our oldest member, to gather and curate their memories of the society. With Desmond's death, we have now lost our only direct link with the pre-war years, but these oral testimonies will provide a valuable resource for future research into the history of the society. Graham Mullan also lent his encyclopaedic knowledge of the society to the project and has done invaluable work checking transcripts and ensuring cave names and other details are correct.

November brought something of shock for the museum, with the news that the staircase needed to be replaced for safety reasons. The next two months passed by in a frantic flurry of emails, meetings, phone calls and collection moves, which culminated at the end of February in the installation of an amazing new staircase, carefully constructed to ensure that we still had the maximum available footprint for the collection both upstairs and downstairs. The staircase, a thing of beauty in its own right, was installed in time for the AGM in March and we were able to get the displays reassembled thanks to a lot of hard work from Tony Boycott, Allan Summerfield, Nathan Cubitt (now our student museum curator) and Helen Rossington. As well as that team, I would like to extend my our very sincere thanks to the huge number of people from the University who worked on this project, including Tedy Mwarewangepo and Gary Spillane from Estates, David Richards, Stuart Bellamy and Saranna Chipper-Keating from the Department of Geography, and Jo Elsworth from the Theatre Collection, who provided much needed moral support when I was about to enter a state of total meltdown after receiving the initial email only three days before the Symposium! Everyone from the University went absolutely over and above the call of duty to help us and to provide solutions to all the challenges that the project posed as well as providing us with a working environment that will serve the collection well for many years to come. I really cannot thank them all enough. We intend to complete the redecoration of the ground floor rooms as soon as we are able to work in the Stables again.

Thank you again to everyone who has helped me so much during an interesting - and at times rather stressful - 12 months, but I'm delighted to report that the results have made all this very worthwhile.

Linda Wilson