

Sixty years on: the Institute of Archaeology, 1937–97

David R. Harris

The editor looks back over the history of the Institute

With the launching of *Archaeology International* we reach another milestone in the eventful life of the Institute. Since the formal opening of its first home – St John's Lodge in Regent's Park – on 29 April 1937, the Institute has grown from a small, if capaciously housed, research institution to become the largest (in terms of staff and students) university "department" of archaeology in Europe. It has done so by a series of steps, some planned, others more fortuitous, that have led from a staff complement of five or six in the 1930s, with even fewer registered students, to today's totals of 70 academic staff, 291 undergraduates and 252 registered postgraduates (138 master's-degree and 114 research students). But despite this prodigious growth, some of the characteristics of today's Institute – e.g. our commitment to archaeology overseas as well as in Britain, to field archaeology, to environmental archaeology and to professional training in conservation – can trace their roots to the then visionary ideas of the Institute's founder and first (Honorary) Director, Dr (later Sir) Mortimer Wheeler.¹

The Institute enjoyed little more than two years in its elegant home in Regent's Park (Fig. 1) before research and teaching was interrupted by the outbreak of the

Second World War. Kathleen Kenyon became Acting Director while Wheeler was serving in the North African and Italian campaigns. He had been expected to return as Director after the war, but instead accepted the post of Director General of Archaeology for India. This led to the appointment of Gordon Childe, who resigned the Abercromby Chair of Archaeology at Edinburgh to become the Institute's first full-time Director in 1946 – an event that had been preceded in October 1945 by the appointment of Frederick Zeuner, who was already an Honorary Lecturer in Geochronology at the Institute, to a part-time Chair in Environmental Archaeology.

In the "Childe decade", from 1946 to 1956, the Institute became firmly established as a research, and to a lesser extent a teaching, institution, and its international reputation grew. During the decade several more academic staff appointments were made, notably Max Mallowan to a (part-time) Chair in Western Asiatic Archaeology, Kathleen Kenyon to a Lectureship in Palestinian Archaeology, and Ian Cornwall to a Lectureship in Environmental Archaeology. But, although some teaching was provided for University of London undergraduates in ancient history and anthropology, and several diploma courses were offered to students registered at the Institute, no undergraduate degrees in archaeology

were started. The Institute remained essentially a small research community somewhat isolated from the heart of the University in Bloomsbury, in the pleasant surroundings of Regent's Park.

It had long been intended that the Institute should eventually move to Bloomsbury, an event that was hastened by the expiry of the lease on St John's Lodge in 1951.² The University offered space in some existing houses on the north side of Gordon Square, and when adjacent space was offered to the Institute of Classical Studies it was decided to demolish the houses (in retrospect, an act of vandalism) and erect the building that the Institute occupies today (Fig. 2). Gordon Childe retired in 1956³ to return to his native Australia (where he ended his life in October 1957), and W. F. ("Peter") Grimes moved from the Museum of London to succeed Childe as Director. As a member of the Institute's Management Committee, Grimes had already been involved in planning the Institute's part of the new building,⁴ which was formally opened by the Queen Mother, Chancellor of the University, on 29 April 1958, exactly 21 years after the original opening of the Institute had taken place at St John's Lodge.

The move to Gordon Square, and the beginning of Professor Grimes' Directorship, ushered in a radically new phase in the development of the Institute. During the 1960s the number of academic staff and their range of expertise were increased, while existing strengths, as in field archaeology and conservation, were reinforced. But the most significant change was the introduction, in 1968, of undergraduate BA (and shortly thereafter BSc) degrees in archaeology,⁵ which, although delayed by opposition from those in the University who regarded archaeology as unsuitable as an undergraduate subject,⁶ soon replaced the by then outmoded postgraduate diplomas.

The numbers of students admitted and the range of courses offered increased further during the Directorship of Professor John Evans, who, from holding the Chair of Prehistoric Archaeology at the Institute, succeeded Professor Grimes on his retirement in 1973. During his time as Director, Professor Evans established, as part of the Institute, the Sussex (now the Field) Archaeology Unit and introduced postgraduate training in museum studies. Despite increasing financial difficulties, as the Institute's core funding from the University began to suffer successive cuts in the 1980s, he also succeeded in adding some new academic posts to the Institute's repertoire, notably a "New Blood" Lectureship in African Archaeology and others in Archaeobotany, Ceramic Technology and Quantitative Techniques.

By far the most significant development at this time was, however, the incorporation of the Institute into University College



Figure 1 *The first home of the Institute of Archaeology: St John's Lodge, Regent's Park, in 1937.*



Figure 2 The building occupied by the Institute of Archaeology today, seen from Gordon Square.

London (UCL), its nearest academic neighbour and the largest multifaculty school of the University. This took place in 1986, while Sir James Lighthill was Provost of UCL, and was preceded by complex negotiations on the academic, financial and administrative implications of the “merger” – a rather mechanistic term for what was in reality the long-delayed realization of part of Mortimer Wheeler’s original vision for his Institute.⁷ During the protracted discussions that followed Wheeler’s original approach to the University in 1927, University College had appointed him to a part-time Lectureship in Prehistoric Archaeology and had agreed to transfer its Egyptology and Classical Archaeology Collections to the proposed new Institute of Archaeology. In 1934 the College even offered space for the Institute at a nominal rent in a former stable it had acquired in Foster Court (where the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology is now housed); an offer that was, however, soon eclipsed by the more alluring prospect of much more spacious accommodation in St John’s Lodge. So, the Egyptology and Classical Archaeology collections remained at UCL (where chairs in both subjects had been established in the late nineteenth century) and

the integration of the Institute and the College was “deferred” for over 50 years.

One important outcome of the negotiations that led to the Institute becoming part of UCL was the creation in the College of an Archaeology and Ancient World Studies Committee, which brought together representatives from 20 UCL arts and science departments and helped to coordinate teaching and stimulate research across conventional academic boundaries. For its first four years the “AAWS” Committee was chaired by the author, who became Director of the Institute in 1989 following Professor Evans’ retirement, while continuing to hold the chair first held by Zeuner at the Institute and later renamed the Chair of Human Environment.

During the early 1990s further major developments took place at the Institute. Student enrolment more than doubled (to totals of c. 300 undergraduates and c. 150 postgraduates) and additional Lectureships were secured in Anthropological Archaeology, Classical Art and Archaeology, Latin American Archaeology, and Museum Studies. At the same time, negotiations took place, following initiatives taken by the new Provost of UCL, Dr (now Sir) Derek Roberts, which led to the integration into the Institute of the UCL medi-

eval archaeologists (then members of the Department of History) and of the UCL Departments of Classical Archaeology and Egyptology.⁸ These changes were accomplished by 1993, with the transfer of nine members of staff and the concomitant extension of the Institute’s academic expertise to encompass the medieval archaeology of northwestern Europe, Greek archaeology (Roman archaeology already being established in the Institute), and Egyptology. These additions could not be accommodated within the already overcrowded confines of the Institute building in Gordon Square, and so the Provost agreed to a request for additional space in three of the early nineteenth-century houses owned by the College on the west side of the Square.

Another important, and more enduring, space-related development took place in the early 1990s: the creation of the Wolfson Archaeological Science Laboratories in the basement of the Institute. This achievement was the result of several years of unremitting fund-raising which, thanks largely to the efforts of our then Development Director, Cathy Giangrande (a former Institute graduate in conservation), succeeded in raising over £400,000 to convert much of the basement into a suite of state-of-the-art laboratories and a large secure artefact

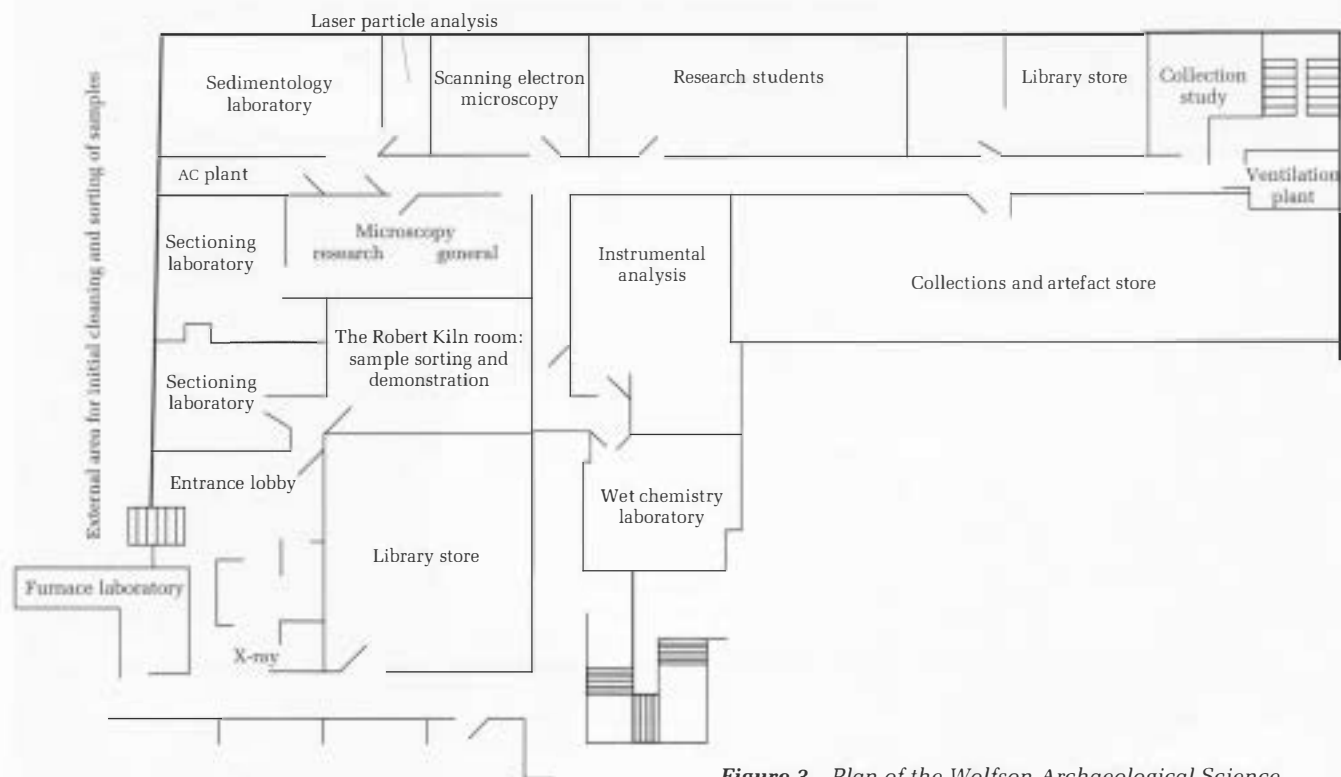


Figure 3 Plan of the Wolfson Archaeological Science Laboratories in the basement of the Institute, opened in 1991.

store (Fig. 3). The Wolfson Laboratories were officially opened by Lord Young of Graffham on 11 July 1991, in the presence of Lord Wolfson and the Provost, and, with the subsequent addition of several new items of equipment, notably an electron microprobe for quantitative elemental analysis, they have enabled us to undertake more advanced scientific research in many aspects of archaeology as well as introduce students to a range of sophisticated analytical techniques.

In addition to the redevelopment of the basement, some other parts of the Institute building were improved during the early 1990s: a computing laboratory was created on the third floor, a new reception area was built in the entrance hall, and display cabinets were installed in the ground-floor "gallery" leading to the Lecture Hall. The latter area has since been the scene of successive exhibitions designed and mounted annually by students taking the MA in Museum Studies. The exhibitions have presented a wide variety of subjects, including several that have highlighted aspects of the Institute's history, notably, in 1996, *Six Decades and Seven Directors*, and, in 1993, *Ahead in their Field: Women at the Institute of Archaeology*, which featured, among others, Kathleen Kenyon, Ione Gedye and Beatrice de Cardi.

A new phase in the life of the Institute began under its present Director, Peter Ucko, who left the University of Southampton, where he was Professor of Archaeology and

Dean of Arts, to come to the Institute. He succeeded the author in August 1996 and, following full discussion with colleagues, has already introduced important changes in the curriculum and in the Institute's internal organization, as well as redefining its academic mission—as he explains in his contribution on p. 6. The Institute enters its seventh decade confident in its role as one of the world's leading centres of archaeological teaching and research.

Notes

1. Readers interested in the foundation and early years of the Institute are referred to the detailed account of the period by Professor J. D. Evans: "The first half century—and after", which was published in 1987 in the *Bulletin of the Institute of Archaeology* 24, 1–25.
2. See p. 18 in Professor Evans' article referred to in *n. 1*.
3. Childe retired one year before he was due to do so to allow his successor, Professor Grimes, to start his Directorship in the new building on Gordon Square (see *Prehistorian: a biography of V. Gordon Childe*, Sally Green, p. 142 (Bradford-on-Avon: Moonraker Press, 1981).
4. From the start, the Institute of Archaeology shared the new building with the Institute of Classical Studies and the Examination Halls of the University.
5. Eighteen undergraduates (14 women and 4 men) were admitted in 1968 to take the full-time BA degree. They variously specialized in prehistoric and environmental archaeology (7), Roman archaeology (6),

Mesopotamia (3) and Palestine (2); and the group included several students who went on to become distinguished professional archaeologists, e.g. Amanda Claridge, Rosemary Ellison, Susan Walker (née Cook) and Ian Hodder.

6. See p. 22 of Professor Evans' article, referred to in *n. 1*.
7. In 1927 Wheeler organized an exhibition at UCL of the results of recent archaeological fieldwork in Britain, and in his autobiography he explains how to achieve "the Institute of Archaeology of my dreams . . . the University of London, through University College (of which I was a Fellow), had to be led gently into the garden and up the right path" (see pp. 84, 87 and 88 in *Still digging*, Mortimer Wheeler (London: Michael Joseph, 1955).
8. It is interesting to note that in a statement on the future needs of the Institute submitted to the University early in 1944 by a subcommittee consisting of Wheeler, Stephen Glanville (Sir Flinders Petrie's successor as Edwards Professor of Egyptology at UCL), Sir Cyril Fox, Kathleen Kenyon and Miss Whinney of the Courtauld Institute, it was suggested that the relocation of the UCL Departments of Egyptology and Classical Archaeology to the Institute of Archaeology "eventually . . . may be found desirable" (see p. 15 in Professor Evans' article referred to in *n. 1*).