

'Breaking Ground: 75 Years of Pioneering Archaeology' at the Institute of Archaeology

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Fig. 1: The exhibition in the A.G. Leventis Gallery of the UCL Institute of Archaeology.

Each year, Museum Studies MA students at the UCL Institute of Archaeology enrol on the 'Exhibition Project' course, in which they stage an exhibition using two display cases in the Institute's A.G. Leventis Gallery. This year, the Exhibition Project had an added dimension in that the course-examiners were also our clients and subject matter. Eleven Museum Studies students, only two of whom had an archaeological background, were given the challenge of producing an exhibition on the topic of the 75th anniversary of

the Institute of Archaeology. We were provided with £1,000, given a set of deadlines, and then largely left to it. The outcome – the exhibition *Breaking Ground: 75 Years of Pioneering Archaeology* – is on public display from May 2012 to February 2013 (**Fig. 1**).

The Exhibition Project gives students a chance to discover what goes on behind the scenes in making an exhibition. The course is invaluable in teaching students how to work as part of a team and to take proper responsibility for their own learning – and results in a tangible piece of work. In making the 2012 exhibition, nothing was outsourced unless the team chose to do so, and the core exhibition roles were played by each team-member. One student was an Evalu-

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ator and Audience Advocate, advising the team on what our target audiences thought of mocked-up designs and of our exhibition concept. Two more were Content Researchers and another the Content Manager, who spent hours trawling through the Institute's Library and Special Collections, as well as interviewing various staff-members past and present. Two Text Writers managed the herculean task of condensing 75 years-worth of history into 60- to 100-word segments. A Collections Manager organised the installation of the exhibition, sourced objects and, crucially, ensured that nothing was broken. A Design Coordinator translated the Exhibition Concept into a physical reality, using colour palettes, imagination and hours of agonising over fonts. The Events Manager spearheaded marketing and organised the April 2012 event *Archaeology Showoff* when, in 9-minute segments, archaeologists entertained an audience in a Camden pub, compered by the inimitable Tim Schadla-Hall. All of these roles were overseen and directed by a Project Manager and a Project Coordinator, who directed fundraising, made sure the team met deadlines and liaised between the team, clients and stakeholders. During the process funds had to be raised, clients appeased, everything had to be evaluated, the text had to be perfect, and as many archaeologists (in a 7-storey building full of them) had to be as satisfied as possible. Nevertheless, the exhibition was completed ahead of schedule and on budget.

Furthermore, in researching for the exhibition, it became rapidly apparent that a great deal can happen in 75 years and that the Institute of Archaeology is not just another academic department, but has its own unique and interesting history. As such, the clue for the concept of *Breaking Ground: 75 Years of Pioneering Archaeology* is in the name. One exhibition case is dedicated to innovation outside the Institute, such as fieldwork, and the other to innovation within the Institute, such as conservation. The exhibition covers the key role played by original staff-members

Sir Mortimer Wheeler and Dame Kathleen Kenyon in developing a fieldwork method that was the precursor to many models used today. The role played by the former Librarian of the Institute, Joan du Plat Taylor, in championing the field of Nautical Archaeology is celebrated through personal documents, as well as her co-pioneer Honor Frost's diving kit. At Cape Gelidonya, Turkey, both women helped to demonstrate (in 1960) that the same high standards employed in on-land excavations could also be applied to those underwater.



Fig. 2: Joan du Plat Taylor and Honor Frost pioneering underwater archaeology at Cape Gelidonya.

Also represented is the integral role the Institute plays in Environmental Archaeology, an ongoing concern since Frederick Zeuner was made the subject's first professor, in the world, in 1946 – a role which has been nurtured in turn by Geoffrey Dimbleby, David Harris, and now Arlene Rosen. The Institute was similarly innovative in archaeological conservation and is now pioneering the new field of social conservation. It has played a

unique role in the development of archaeological photography, having had a full-time photographer on the staff since its foundation.¹ The Institute's involvement in rescue archaeology is represented through the work of former Director W.F. 'Peter' Grimes in post-World War II London, and which continues today through the Centre for Applied Archaeology (see pp. xx-x). The Institute's role in promoting new ways of understanding and teaching archaeology is reflected in a section on former Director Vere Gordon Childe and Experimental Archaeology. Also included are objects relating to St John's Lodge, the Institute's home in Regent's Park from 1937–57, and to its current home in Gordon Square.²

This year's course has hopefully left behind a legacy through both its research on the history of the Institute and the series of interviews with staff-members past and present, to be kept in the Institute's Archives. The Project was also interesting from a research perspective because of the methods used to make Institutional histories. The Institute of Archaeology has a deep history which tracks the changes in university education and the development of archaeology, both in the academic and private sphere, as well as through numerous fascinating individual biographies. This information is dispersed among archives, academic journals and the memories of living archaeologists and conservators, all of which could never be fully conveyed in just two exhibition cases. Places such as the UCL Institute of Archaeology are very much creating history as they go along. The multitude of stories uncovered would make an intriguing subject for a daunting – but rewarding – project on the comprehensive history of London's Institute of Archae-

ology. As it is, *Breaking Ground* focuses mostly on the earlier history of the Institute simply because that is the period for which the sources are most readily available.³ The modern innovations of the Institute would require an archaeologist versed in the intricacies of the discipline to determine its impact and importance today. Indeed, the primary goal of *Breaking Ground: 75 Years of Pioneering Archaeology* has been to convey not just the innovations and importance of the Institute of Archaeology in the past, but also its continuing importance for the present and into the future.

The Exhibition Project Team for 2012 consisted of Natasha Almedia, Chloe Bent, Maxwell Blowfield, Nicole Dawkins, Abigail Girling, Adam Koszary, Lucy May Maxwell, Eleni Nikolaidou, Caroline Paganussi, Liza Shapiro and Jessica Talarico.

Notes

- 1 See Amara Thornton and Sara Perry, 'Collection and production: the history of the Institute of Archaeology through photography', *Archaeology International* 13/14 (2009–2011), 101–107, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/ai.1319>.
- 2 For a selection of relevant illustrations, see 'From the Archives' in *Archaeology International* 13/14 (2009–2011), 112–118, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/ai.1321>, and this volume, pp. xx-xx.
- 3 For a convenient summary, see the 'Institute of Archaeology Golden Jubilee Lecture, No. 1', given by the then Director, Professor John D. Evans, on 'The first half-century – and after', available as a reprint from the Institute's *Bulletin* 24 (1987) and online at XX