

Editorial

SIMON STODDART & CAROLINE MALONE

On 6 December 2000 the latest and, in our opinion, the greatest of cultural monuments in London to mark the millennium was opened by the Queen: the Great Court of the British Museum. The formula of this architectural work by Foster has similarities to the Tate Modern project already discussed in *ANTIQUITY* (74: 457–9). This is the reworking and enhancing of an existing structure in the cause of culture through the preservation and development of a recovered voluminous space. Furthermore, both are the product of a portfolio of funding (£134 million for the Tate; more than £100 million for the British Museum) from the lottery, state and private donors. More than any other millennium project in Britain, the British Museum building represents a welcome Europeanization of cultural space adapted in distinctive style to the Atlantic climate which has prevailed over the last few months in this country. The Louvre erected an intrusive pyramid. The British Museum has covered the entire courtyard. The spatial articulation and flow of visitors within the British Museum has been transformed. The court is uncluttered and occupied by only a few, selected pieces of sculpture, such as the Cnidos lion, allowing flexible unconstrained movement for the visitor. Access is now possible to the ground and upper floor galleries by means of this newly revealed interior, which additionally provides access to knowledge and food. The full effect has been achieved in superb architectural style, through a soaring glass and steel roof, encircling the round Reading Room. Here is a heart for the museum, open until late in the evening, providing a new museum ambience, a new narrative whose telling will be followed with interest in these pages. The Court has the potential to become a nodal point comparable to Piccadilly, Trafalgar Square, Waterloo and other crossroads of the city of London.

Further space has been realized below the floor of the courtyard and within the former Reading Room of the British Library. The Education centre includes two auditoria and five multi-purpose rooms which will support activities, particularly for younger visitors who

now number some 250,000 every year. The famous Reading Room, frequented by Marx, has become a reference library and a place of entry into the Internet resources of the museum. The 25,000-volume, 300-seat library provides open access to publications relevant to the civilizations and societies represented in the collections of the Museum. The COMPASS (Collections Multimedia Public Access System) IT system offers an explanatory database of the principal collections from 50 computer terminals. This same service has been extended to an external audience through the web (<http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/compass>). The system will be expanded in the course of time but already covers a range of information: for example, plans of the galler-



The Gladiators exhibition in the long-standing temporary exhibition space included this 1st-century AD bronze helmet of a heavily armed gladiator. We celebrate the new image of a Romano-British gladiator in the colour Notes. (Photo © The British Museum.)



The striking night image of the Great Court recalls the new 14-hour access to the centre of the museum. The courtyard covers some two acres (96x72 m), of which 6000 sq. m are covered by the 800-tonne roof. The glass has been screen-printed with small dots to filter ultra-violet light and reduce solar gain. Sliding bearings allow natural movement and loading to be spread laterally and evenly through the courtyard façades. (Photo Phil Sayer © The British Museum.)

ies showing the location of selected objects, bibliographic information (especially from the reference library), in-depth information on displayed objects, links with the UK National Curriculum, links to other comparable databases and colour prints. In an elliptical extension to the Reading Room, connected by encircling staircases rising from the Great Court, temporary exhibition space has been provided in the Great

Court gallery. This has opened with an exhibition on the Human Image, drawing from a wide selection of the cultures represented in the museum's collections. (For colour pictures from both the Human Image exhibition and the new Great Court, see pages 9 & 12). The long-standing temporary exhibition space will continue to be used for other displays such as *Gladiators*.

The Great Court opening is part of an ongoing programme leading up to the 250th anniversary in 2003 of the museum's foundation. The approach to the distinctive colonnaded façade of the museum has been improved by lawns, paving, gravel and outdoor seating. The programme inside the museum itself includes the restoration of the King's Library, which will be dedicated to the intellectual context of early museology. One of the most important future developments is the planned creation of a Study Centre in an old Royal Mail sorting office, two minutes from the museum. Whereas the Reading Room will only have room for virtual collections, preserved on paper and refreshed electronically, the new Study Centre will provide much enhanced access for the visitor and the scholar alike to the vast reserve collections. These collections will be brought together from disparate stores and rehoused in a series of floors around a large atrium, enabling visible storage of some material. Thematic introductions to the study of the collections may form one element of public access to the Study Centre. As visitors, students and research scholars progress in their acquisition of knowledge and interest, they will gain deeper access into the surrounding rooms and collections through study days, courses and object research. Access is the key to the new political message of the British Museum but, in contrast to some other trends in the educational policy of the government, it must be promoted with no sacrifice to excellence and research.

It is sad to see that no great cultural success in the United Kingdom is without some element of controversy. The Tate Modern was affected by a swaying bridge, which united the banks of the Thames with the new museum. The Great Court Project has been similarly but, in our opinion, incorrectly tainted by this media-led infection of created conspiracy. Characteristically, PricewaterhouseCoopers have been commissioned to produce yet another report (we have seen many in Higher Education), this time on the Portico of the Great Court. The Portico cost less than 2% of the total cost of the magnificent development and yet has attracted a disproportionate amount of attention by media too frequently intent on uncovering failure in success. In our opinion, and that of Chris Chippindale, our predecessor as

Editor of *ANTIQUITY*, the distinctive French limestone is a positive conservation asset. He writes:

'After some disasters in high-profile British public projects it is essential, more than usual, that behind a seeming success there be a Secret Scandal. The Secret Scandal so discovered of the Great Court, a project completed on time and on budget, is that the wrong stone was used for the reconstructed South Portico. Now the new Great Court exposes once again the original central courtyard of the British Museum, the one lost as a court when it was filled with Panizzi's round Reading Room and its book-stacks. It is neo-classical, with a central portico to each side. Three of the porticoes survived the court's transformations, and museum visitors see them, once again, suitably worn where time and rain has hurt them, but protected now by the new roof. The South Portico, long demolished, has been built anew. It should have been in an oolitic limestone, Portland stone from the basebed or similar, to match the existing stone. The masons (having won the job with a tender 40% below the next lowest — no wonder they were squeezed for cash) substituted a cheaper stone, Anstrude. Whether it would have looked the same in Portland, one does not know. But the new South Portico is a success not a disaster, *because* it looks so different from the others. After all the talk of Scandal, one is tempted to call it a triumph. It is a twin to the old porticoes in everything but its surface appearance; they are battered by a century and more of vagaries, it is new and pristine — and, since it is protected from weathering, that difference will endure. It makes a neat and reticent reference to the paradox of a great museum like the BM: everything in it is battered as time and chance has treated it, yet its dream is to know these things when they were perfect and pristine.'

The magnificent portico and the enveloping Great Court *are* surely a Triumph. The portico is compatible but distinct, in proper modern conservation style. Petty words from a former Chairman of English Heritage who has failed to address the concerns of the premier prehistoric monument of England, Stonehenge, should not distract us.

Theoreticians are quick to place material culture at the centre of archaeology. There is a tradition from an antiquarian past through Gordon Childe and David Clarke to the editors

of the *Journal of Material Culture* which stresses the centrality of the artefact for archaeology.

Scanning the large numbers of books that come to the ANTIQUITY office we are privileged to see a useful cross-section of the current production of colleagues and institutions that mark the ever-developing discipline of archaeology. What is immediately striking is the balance of what is being published. There are plenty of overviews of cultures, of theories, of landscapes (ANTIQUITY has itself just produced *Landscapes from Antiquity*), of environments, of collected papers around themes, but there is a lack of books about the material we dig up, and around which we centre our interpretation of the past.

In the world of British archaeology, there is little today that passes as honest material culture in the publications, few manuals of stone or pot, few in-depth studies of the role of particular objects or material, few corpora of the classic things — Roman lamps, Bronze tools and the rest. Now why is this? Has it all been done, or have we reached an age where the solid evidence of the past in sites and the things we find in them is to be disregarded as old hat and dull? A quick scan of current university courses gives a pretty good idea of the priorities of the course contents and the skills that students gain from them — plenty of transferable skills — but really not much detailed knowledge of specific objects and the methods to study them. Of course most graduating students will not wish to transfer skills in the precision of flint technology and typology or in Roman pottery, so perhaps universities are right to focus on the big picture rather than the detail. On the other hand, is anyone continuing to learn sufficiently the vital material culture that underpins the very study of archaeology?

Is such knowledge and skill even needed, now that EVERYTHING is on the internet? The answer is probably a resounding YES. There is a real need to have people who still know about the things of archaeology, as well as arguing about the broad-brush interpretations. Training in skills and detail has been well recognized in the environmental and scientific applications of archaeological work and teaching for some time, and there is no lack of knowledge in these areas. However, is it possible to find someone under the age of 30 who really knows about the pottery or coins of Roman Britain and can write a decent site report on

them? You will be hard pushed to locate this person, and the archaeological units, not to mention the museums, if they have the resources for a specialist, will have pounced on this individual some time ago. The same lack of expertise is true of prehistoric flint (perhaps there is a Palaeolithic exception here?) and prehistoric pot and metal, and Roman tiles or lead or Medieval beads . . . the list goes on. Indeed, scan the titles of recent MAs and Ph.Ds submitted at universities, and almost none are about the things that fill the excavation stores and the museums or are the work of busy archaeological units.

For a generation now, it has been deeply unfashionable to study material; it also has low RAE value, and many of the staff in universities no longer know nor care about it, even though most university courses contain one or two modules on Artefacts, Archaeometallurgy, Ceramics, Coins, Conservation, Museums and the like. The skills of interpreting the past from the real material culture, rather than from the ideas about it, have themselves almost become a past.

Yet, alongside this sad state of affairs, the various institutions that dig material and have to store it do so at enormous cost to developers, taxpayers and local and national governments. The long-term cost of keeping the precious artefacts — those crucial clues to the past — far exceeds the use to which they are being put. They are often stored in climatically controlled buildings at the hearts of great cities, lovingly cared for by devoted curators. Just now and then, a fanatic from somewhere, and probably not a university, and often from abroad, will come and study and compare the objects and use the precious resource for some worthy piece of work. In some fields, such as Egyptology, and some sectors of the Palaeolithic (where material still predominates), there is no decline in enthusiasm for objects, and museums are constantly asked for access to such collections. But this is not the case for most areas of archaeology.

The lack of artefactual knowledge amongst the present generation of archaeologists (but not metal detectorists!) has become more evident in recent years, fuelled by the excellent initiative to appoint regional Finds Liaison Officers to deal with the Portable Antiquities Scheme. This programme has developed from the 1996 Treasure Act in England and Wales (in force since 24 September 1997), which in-

volves the statutory reporting of all potential 'treasure' to a museum or a Finds Liaison Officer for recording and consideration as 'Treasure'. The Department of Culture, Media and Sport and the Heritage Lottery Fund have each funded some six Finds Liaison Officers for a trial period in selected regions and much good work has been done. However, the future funding of the scheme is currently being assessed, and at present the two funding bodies are considering only another 12 months each.

The value of the scheme is already reaping huge rewards in the returns from its initiatives (Bland 2000). Finds reporting across the country has exploded, and in many regions this exceeds a 300–1000% increase. Marginal areas for archaeological finds, such as the northwest of England, traditionally reported about 4–5 objects a year; now it is 80. These are not the only rewards reaped by the scheme (the organizers are Roger Bland and Richard Hobbs of the British Museum Department of Coins and Medals and the 12 Finds Liaison Officers), which has won the year 2000 'Silver Trowel Award' from Spear & Jackson for 'Archaeological achievement', and the Virgin Holidays award for the 'Best presented archaeological project'. The awards recognize the scheme's role in improving relations between metal detectorists and archaeologists which encourages cooperation from detectorists and finders to voluntarily report their finds. Dr Roger Bland, co-ordinator of the Portable Antiquities Scheme, received the awards from HRH Prince Hassan of Jordan at Edinburgh Castle on 22 November 2000. 'The judges chose the Portable Antiquities Scheme because it demonstrated the potential to change public attitudes to archaeology through careful research, effective result dissemination and raising awareness of the importance of archaeological finds.'

However, these champions of artefact recognition and public liaison demonstrate how lacking are experienced artefact specialists within the bulk of the archaeological community, in regional museums, units and amongst many, if not most, archaeology graduates. When all but 15–20% of the paid archaeological jobs are in museums, heritage and archaeological units rather than universities, it is a serious dereliction of duty on the part of archaeology teachers not to impart the basic skills, interest and indeed enthusiasm in the artefact essentials of the discipline. Artefact courses on offer at uni-

versities are invariably general, optional or at Master's level, and not seen as a core part of the syllabus. Doubtless this crisis in artefact expertise is not true of all countries (especially not central and eastern Europe) and of the many different sub-disciplines of archaeology, but it is one that British colleagues need to address, before too long. There is great demand for suitably interested graduates to pursue the artefact route and become conversant, if not expert, in archaeological material! The public also demand these experts and we ignore this at our peril!

☛ While the premier archaeological museum of Britain is celebrating at the millennium, museums outside the capital are facing a potential crisis. This crisis is echoed for Modern Art by Nicholas Serota in his BBC Dimbleby lecture (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/artzone/dimbleby/value2.shtml>). Museums require not just major capital investment which can be derived from lottery funds, development funds and private donors, but the less glamorous running and maintenance costs. These include the development of the skills of material culture discussed above, and also the basic costs of staff, storage and conservation. The new body, Resource: the Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries, has responded with a discussion paper (*Resource 2000*; <http://www.museums.gov.uk>) to set the context for which, if any, museums should be defined as 'pre-eminent' and thus receive substantial central government support. The paper isolates several areas where local museums have been brought under pressure:

- 1 Local authority resources are shifting towards statutory services such as education and social services and away from discretionary services such as museums.
- 2 Political pressure is capping local authority expenditure.
- 3 The government re-organization in unitary authorities has led to a shedding of resources for discretionary expenditure.
- 4 Demands on museum resources have increased as expectations have increased.
- 5 Under re-organization of local authority committees, museum directors have less access to influential local politicians.
- 6 Maintenance of branch museums is expected by the community but has led to a dilution of resources.

To this we might add that the pressure towards accountability is accompanied by the pressure for documentation which has led to a major increase in bureaucracy for all employed directly or indirectly by the government. The report claims that core revenue funding has been maintained by local authorities, rising from £107 million in 1995–6 to £118 million in 1999–2000, but admits that this is only effectively at the same level and includes a drop in funding during 1996–7. The overall trend conceals major regional differences. Interestingly, *regional* London and *independent* Scotland (especially Glasgow) have experienced the major drops in funding. A sample of 26 large museums experienced a 2% fall in revenue expenditure, although nearly three-quarters had increased expenditure, again suggesting major variation. There are also constraints on expenditure within the creative elements of the museum activities: acquisitions, exhibitions, staffing and educational programmes. This leads inevitably to shorter opening hours, a move from specialist to generalist staffing and smaller numbers of exhibitions. The 26 museums show staffing has fallen by 7%, but freelance staff have increased in number, and conservation support has declined.

The solution proposed by this report is rationalization: the managers' solution that will, no doubt, once more engage the services of a management consultancy firm. There is, however, much to be said for local identity and diversity, since this historically derived pattern produces a much greater level of creativity and voluntary investment and energy than the centralized and controlled approach which is the current trend of modern government. Our country has a richness of museums, precisely because of the legacy of the lack of control from the centre. As the report suggests, rationalization implements prioritization, but if that is centred around the National Curriculum of Education, there will inevitably be an Excluded Past, as favoured topics dominate.

A further aired suggestion in the report is that the running of the museums could be allocated to Trusts giving them freedom from local government control, while the buildings and collections should remain the inalienable property of local government, securing their preservation for posterity. This route has already been followed in part by Sheffield, where extra funds were made

available to give stability to the new structure. One possibility for providing such financial stability is to draw on lottery endowments for capital rather than infrastructure. In our opinion, such a Trust structure is preferable to the alternative suggestion of constant inspection from the centre and the concurrent bureaucracy.

Another key issue is the maintenance of research in our museums. Access and education should not lead to a decline in research activity. Indeed, successful access and education are based on informed research. Another recent report (Gunn & Prescott 1999) undertaken by the Museums & Galleries Commission has investigated this important component of a museum's *raison d'être*. The report established that although 90% of museum curators consider research to be crucial, almost as many felt these activities were under threat, because of a lack of time and financial resources. Only a third of curators had research and publication budgets. In at least one case-study, the Cogges Manor Farm project of Oxfordshire Museums, museum staff funded the publication, but only the local university had the time to undertake the necessary research (Gunn & Prescott 1999: 56). Much research is linked to exhibitions. However, since many exhibitions lacked the resources for catalogues, the accompanying research will always be a transient memory. On the other hand, there was some evidence that in certain areas research had increased, in part because of changed definitions of research, but also because of unpaid work, the use of contract researchers and the switch from the traditionally elaborate catalogues towards exhibition-linked research and publication.

☞ Some elements of the intellectual media point out that preserving the past is the luxury of the rich concentrated in Surrey (one of the affluent counties of Britain, near London, occupied by stockbrokers) (Paxman 1999: 152). Against this must be measured the fact that more than 80 million visits to 2500 museums take place each year and that this compares well with most other popular leisure activities. Even the sporting success of this country appears to be seeking archaeological roots. At the recent Olympics, apart from shooting and cycling, success has been focused on sports with an ancient origin: rowing (ANTIQUITY 61: 455–9); sailing (ANTIQUITY 17: 27ff); boxing, jumping

and running. Football (soccer for some of our readers), the supposed national game of distinctly recent origin, with a lower annual attendance than museums, failed even to produce an Olympic team. The reason was ostensibly because we compete as constituent national units (Scotland, Wales, England, Northern Ireland), but more probably because there was no big money to be earned.

Archaeologists must also work towards the protection and coverage of the full sequence of the past. The National Curriculum should cover a past before historical invasions. Symptomatic of this is the way in which the high-profile media historian, Simon Schama, has been turning his attention to the History of Britain in both written and televised form. We can report that a mere one episode out of 16 was devoted to the period before 1000 AD, although he admitted — as one reviewer put it — that there was culture in the Iron Age. We hope that Schama may be subject to the same conversion as Hoskins, who started with a similar myopia in the formation of the English landscape, but came to realize the fundamental importance of prehistory. Correspondingly, it is incumbent on archaeologists to make these more remote periods of the past exciting, and that brings us back again to the centrality of material culture, albeit placed in context.

Context and material culture are key to another issue: the *Illicit Trade in Antiquities*. The Ministerial Advisory panel on this issue has just reported and recommended that the UK should now accede to the UNESCO convention (DCMS 2000). The report proposes that ‘it be a criminal offence dishonestly to import, deal in or be in possession of any cultural object, knowing or believing that object was stolen, or illegally excavated, or removed from any monument or wreck contrary to local law’. This recommendation has important implications for British involvement in the antiquities trade, both as a importer and exporter. Some of the most famous cases involve the great auction houses (e.g. the Sevso treasure, Apulian vases and Cycladic figurines). However, significant case-studies presented in the report refer to the illegal outflow of objects from the United Kingdom: Wanborough, Icklingham, and Salisbury. Even now, English Style Metal Detecting Rallies are openly advertised on the Internet.

An important and in part encouraging report is *Power and Place* from English Heritage, whose consultative process we have already discussed (ANTIQUITY 74: 460–64). Eighteen key recommendations have emerged which include a stress on conservation-led renewal, the promotion of maintenance to reduce costs of repair, to increase educational value and access, to improve regulation, to encourage research and scholarship and to provide government leadership at both the local and national level. The key will be the translation of these sentiments into action. However, action also needs to be applied to those parts of archaeology not covered in sufficient detail by the report. The built environment extends beyond the modern buildings which are emphasized in the report’s pages. Furthermore, there is a deeper time beyond the documentary past, and there are landscapes which encompass the bricks and mortar. To take one example, landscapes are mentioned in passing in the Knowledge section of the report, but not with sufficient emphasis. Other more rounded actions (recommendations) need to be introduced. The full archaeological record needs to be investigated with properly funded fieldwork, and when finds are made in abundance (such as through the Treasure Act), proper balance achieved between access and security.

One trend that we as editors find immensely useful and a welcome product of the transparency presented by government is that many of the issues discussed above are immediately presented as both full reports and summary statements on the internet. The summary press-release statements often take a particular vein of the message of the full report, but it is entirely feasible to check the information, if time allows. A key issue in this access to transparency is that the government and other agencies ensure that the information so presented is archived for posterity in electronic form. ANTIQUITY has archived some of the key manifesto statements for monitoring later, but we need to be assured that we, and our successors as editors, can return to the archived report or promised action to check progress.

We are indebted to Peter Gathercole who has provided a sleuthing postscript, at our invitation, to the photograph of Robert Cook recently published in ANTIQUITY (74: 748). Peter

clarifies that the Late Medieval (c. 1300 AD) site of Thurgarton shown in the photograph was being sampled by Robert Cook for palaeomagnetic dating (Gathercole & Wailes 1959). The excavation provides an important example of industrial sponsorship, since the entire fieldwork expenses were covered by the owners, Boots Pure Drug Co Ltd. The sleuthing is related to the precise date of the photograph. The site was re-opened, as the photo shows, and therefore has a *terminus post quem* of 1955. The *terminus ante quem* is provided by the ANTIQUITY article of 1958, and the departure of Peter Gathercole for New Zealand. As Peter Gathercole writes, 'So it was either 1956 or 1957. I recall seeing Bernard [Wailes] and Sarah in Cambridge before I went to NZ — & they to Penn — which was either 1957 or early 1958. I don't think the Thoroton Society people or Boots would have liked the site left temporarily covered 1957. I went to Scunthorpe Museum in Spring '56, from B'ham museum, where I went in October '54. During this period took place Bernard's work ('55) & the writing up. My feeling is that (on balance) the photo should be dated 1956, before I went to Scunthorpe. You can see from the photo that, tho' a dry day, it is not summer. So I suggest it was March 1956.' This precise stratigraphy rules the Editors out of any involvement, and so we have contacted Bernard Wailes to cast further light. He writes, 'I'm not convinced that this photo was taken at Castle Hill, Thurgarton. No background scenery to give a clue, annoyingly! Whatever the time of year (almost certainly during a Cambridge term), the builders' planks suggest that excavation was in progress. The presence of N. Barley strongly suggests that we were somewhere within easy range of Nottingham. The presence of both Peter G. and myself (the 1954 and 1955 directors) indicates that we all went to Thurgarton on that same day. But I wonder if the photo was taken at some other excavation visited or sample-taking on the same day? DATE: I can't add anything to Peter G's thoughts — some time during a Cambridge term in 1955–6, or possibly 1956–7'.

There have been some new appointments in the ANTIQUITY team. Simon Stoddart exchanges roles with Caroline Malone, and they are now Editor and Deputy Editor respectively.

Helen Strudwick, an Egyptologist and computer officer by background, joins the team as Editorial assistant and will thus be handling many of your enquiries. We are happy to announce the appointment of five new advisory editors: Elizabeth De Marrais, Robert Knox, Mike Parker Pearson, Paul Pettitt and Alison Sheridan.

Announcement of the winners of the two prizes awarded annually by ANTIQUITY will be in the June issue. The first prize (for an established author) is awarded from the resources of the Antiquity Trust. The second is awarded to the most promising contribution by a younger author in memory of Ben Cullen, supported by his friend Ian Gollop.

The very recent publication of the collected papers of Ben Cullen (Cullen 2000) gives an opportunity to call attention to the achievement of this young scholar, who died aged 31. The new publication, edited by James Steele, Richard Cullen and Christopher Chippindale, demonstrates the momentum he gave to neo-Darwinism within archaeology, through his own 'distinctive contribution': Cultural Virus Theory. As James Steele states: 'Ben was a young scholar whose ideas were developing quickly and changing as they grew. We cannot know where his ideas would have taken him, so we have not presumed to guess: this book tries simply to present in good order and at reasonable length that which he had done when he left us' (Steele 2000: xiv). We hope that the Cullen prize will give each recipient some recognition which will take them far in time and achievement.

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The Human image of the Classical World. *The discus-thrower* (c. 120–140 AD) from Hadrian's Villa at Tivoli (near Rome) is more typical of the traditional classical image of the British Museum. (Photo © The British Museum.)



The Human Image of the New World. *Illuminating world cultures is the new epithet of the museum. The diversity is illustrated by a priestly mask of the Aztec God Tezcatlipoca 1400–1521 AD. The image is composed of a turquoise and lignite mosaic over a human skull.* (Photo © The British Museum.)

As we go to press, we learn that DR 'SCOTTY' MACNEISH has died in Belize City, Central America, as the result of a vehicle accident in the Maya Mountains. NORMAN HAMMOND writes:

Richard Stockton 'Scotty' MacNeish

29 April 1918–16 January 2001

Known universally as 'Scotty', and as proud of his Caledonian roots as of his New Jersey rebel forebears, Richard MacNeish was noted for his lifelong pursuit of the origins of agriculture. He made his reputation in the 1960s with the Tehuacan Valley Project, a multi-disciplinary study of a high, dry valley in central Mexico which documented the climatic and agricultural prehistory of a New World culture for the first time. Preceded and followed by less dramatically successful investigations in north-eastern Mexico, Peru, Belize and, most recently, China, MacNeish's place as one of the most significant archaeologists of the 20th century will remain secured by the Tehuacan work.

He came to pursue the origins of maize agriculture — the single great cereal staple that underpinned the rise of New World village societies and eventually the great civilizations of the Maya, Aztec and Inca — after a varied career that included many months of fieldwork in the Canadian Arctic and sites across the United States. He realized that maize, grown in Pre-Columbian times from central North America all the way south to Bolivia, Argentina and Chile, was the equivalent of the wheat, barley, rye and oats that had made the civilizations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, India and Central Asia possible, and by extension the development of the entire Greco-Roman tradition.

The study of this 'Neolithic Revolution' began in Asia in the 1950s, stimulated by the theories of V. Gordon Childe and the excavations of Kathleen Kenyon at Jericho and Robert Braidwood at Jarmo. Like them, MacNeish realized that the period after the end of the last Ice Age,

some 10,000 years ago, was crucial for all of subsequent human history, and that the new tool of radiocarbon dating would be vital in a continent where there was almost no documentary history prior to the Spanish conquest.

Early maize was known from Bat Cave, New Mexico, but an early-established collaboration with the botanist Paul Mangelsdorf at Harvard, who had been studying the plant's evolution since the 1930s, made it clear that this was already a fully domesticated form, not the primitive maize that would indicate the region of origin. The existence of a close relative *teosinte* in Mexico and Guatemala suggested that this origin lay south of the Rio Grande, and MacNeish duly moved in the 1950s to investigate dry caves in the state of Tamaulipas.

He sought such sites because, although there were tempting hints from pollen found near Mexico City that very old maize had existed there, conditions of preservation were not such that plant remains were likely to survive. Dry caves, with their protected and desiccated deposits, were the best places pragmatically to seek the origins of New World farming, although MacNeish never believed that they were either the earliest or the optimal settlements of such farmers.

The results from Tamaulipas approximated those from New Mexico, as did those from a subsequent excavation at the Santa Marta Cave in Chiapas, in the far southeast of Mexico: only fully developed races of maize were present. At this point, in 1960, MacNeish moved to Tehuacan, an isolated and elevated valley with scant rainfall southeast of Mexico City.

Over the course of four years his team discovered scores of sites spanning the past 12,000 years: some of them, included Coxcatlan, Purron, El Riego and San Marcos Caves, have become *loci classici* of not merely Mesoamerican, but world prehistory. The Coxcatlan excavations in particular, supervised by Melvin Fowler under MacNeish's direction, became notable for the vast haul of desiccated plant and other remains they yielded.

These included what Mangelsdorf and MacNeish identified as 'wild maize', the postulated precursor to the staple crop of later times. Radiocarbon dates on burnt wood associated with these filter-tip-sized cobs, many of them chewed and spat out into the fire by prehispanic occupants of the cave, placed them around 5000 BC, allowing a period of some four millennia

for the development of village farming as the basis for the rise of Olmec, Zapotec and Maya civilization in different regions of Mexico and its neighbours.

The development of radiocarbon calibration in the later 1960s added several centuries to this date, while research led by Kent V. Flannery, one of MacNeish's staff who had begun an independent project in the valley of Oaxaca, suggested that maize pollen at the Guila Naquitz cave there could have been nearly three millennia older. An early beginning for American agriculture, comparable with that of cereal farming in southwest Asia and Anatolia, seemed assured; it was only in the 1980s that reanalysis of some of MacNeish's original samples, using the new AMS radiocarbon method which was able to date the tiny maize fragments themselves, suggested that the Coxcatlan Cave and cognate specimens were no older than 3600 BC.

By that point Mangelsdorf and MacNeish's 'wild maize' had been challenged: George Beadle and others suggested that it was in fact an early cultivated form, that the wild ancestor was *teosinte*, and that the hypothesised wild form of maize was, and would remain, a hypothesis. The identification of *teosinte* races genetically almost identical with early domesticated maize has persuaded most scholars, although MacNeish never accepted the argument and to the end of his life continued to produce complex diagrams supporting his and Mangelsdorf's thesis.

Richard Stockton MacNeish was born in New York City on 29 April 1918, the son of Harris Franklin and Elizabeth Stockton MacNeish. He married Diana Walter in 1963; they had two adopted sons. He was a schoolboy boxer of note, winning the Binghampton Golden Gloves in 1938; he took all his degrees at the University of Chicago, beginning with a BA in 1940 and completing his Ph.D in 1949; while a student he also headed a WPA archaeology unit in Illinois.

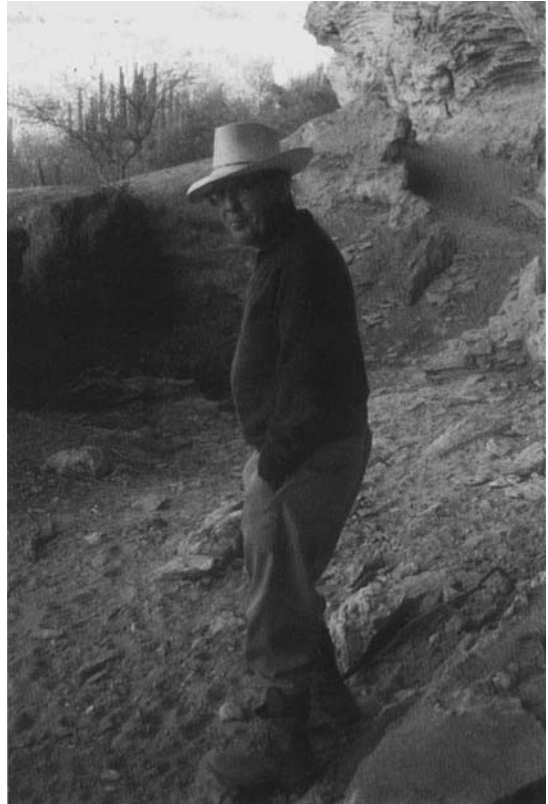
He joined the National Museum of Canada as an archaeologist in 1949 and stayed until 1962, halfway through the Tehuacan project; in 1964 he founded the Department of Archaeology at the University of Calgary, the first such freestanding department (rather than an anthropology, classics, near eastern or art history department with one or two archaeologists in it) in the Americas. He subsequently spent the years 1982–1986 at the newly established Department

of Archaeology at Boston University, the first in the United States.

In between, from 1968 to 1983, he was director of the Robert S. Peabody Foundation, an anomalous but enviably independent institution attached to a boys' boarding school in Massachusetts which allowed him freedom to do research with the aid of the substantial external grants which now came his way. He left the foundation after a disagreement about its endowment having been diverted to general school purposes, and after leaving Boston University (he found it difficult to get back into normal academic harness) he founded his own Andover Foundation for Archaeological Research as the grant-receiving vehicle for the rest of his career. He calculated that he had spent 5683 days on fieldwork in his four decades of active research, which were punctuated by several serious illnesses that would have pushed a less driven investigator into retirement.

The long-term cultural and environmental history of the Tehuacan Valley, the first post-Pleistocene sequence for any region important in New World archaeology, remains a major achievement, as does MacNeish's management of the large team of specialists he enlisted to probe the area. His subsequent attempt to document the processes underlying the emergence of the cultural tradition that culminated in the Inca Empire in Peru was moderately successful, but it was for the Tehuacan work that he was rewarded with just about every honour that American archaeology could bestow. It earned him the Spinden Medal for Archaeology in 1964, the Drexel Medal in 1965 from the University of Pennsylvania and the Merrill Medal from Yale in 1966, as well as the Kidder Medal from the American Anthropological Association in 1971 and the Cornplanter Medal for Iroquois research in 1977. He was a Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy and a member of the US National Academy of Sciences, as well as the recipient of several honorary degrees and professorships in both North and South America.

In the 1980s MacNeish turned again to Mesoamerica, convinced by early radiocarbon dates emanating from the Cuello site in Belize (subsequently shown to be a thousand years too early) that a pre-agricultural Archaic occupation of the Maya lowlands of Belize was there for the finding. His surveys failed to locate well-stratified sites, and the developmental sequence



Scotty MacNeish at Coxcatlan Cave, Tehuacan, Mexico, January 1979. (Photo Norman Hammond.) Coxcatlan Cave, where numerous carbonized cobs and kernels of primitive races of maize were recovered, was one of the key sites in re-constructing the origins of New World agriculture. The oldest cobs were originally placed at 5000–5500 BC, but AMS dating shows them to be some two millennia younger, and the development of Mesoamerica from the first farmers to the emergence of complex societies both later and more rapid than hitherto supposed.

of stone tools that he proposed, based on his surface finds and parallels with other areas as far away as Texas, was not generally accepted.

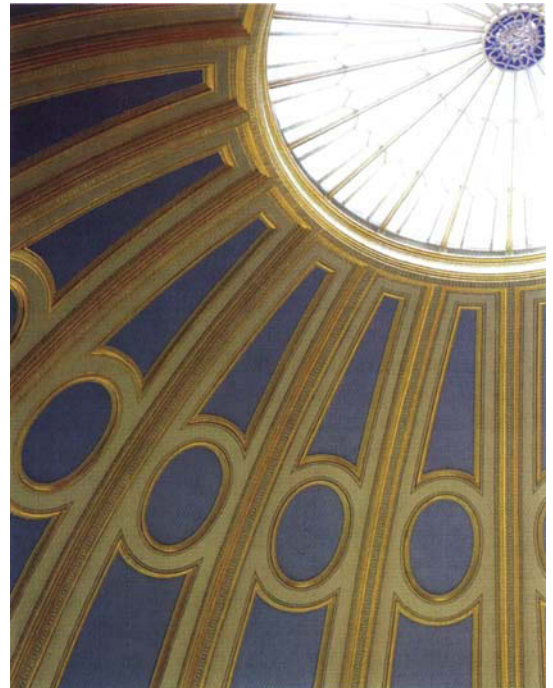
He was gratified by recent evidence that some sort of Archaic presence preceded the first Maya villages, however, and although his professional attention had shifted to seeking the origins of rice cultivation in the Yangtse basin of southern China, he continued to visit the area. It was on one such journey, travelling between the Maya cities of Lamanai and Caracol, that he suffered the accident that resulted in his death in January.



The voluminous space of the Great Court from the contentious south portico. (Photo © The British Museum.)



The Great Court offers an uncluttered space. The Cnidus lion (300 BC) is one of a select group of monumental sculptures that provide points of reference within some 6000 sq. m. (Photo © The British Museum.)



The detail above right shows the roof of the Reading Room which has hosted many famous readers since its opening in 1857. The interior lining — a form of papier-mâché called Fibrous Slab, pressed and rolled from paper, resins and chalk — has been restored with a mile-and-a-half of Flexiweave, 25 km of 23·25-carat gold and over two tonnes of paint, to refresh the original azure-blue, cream and gold decorative scheme. (Photo by Nigel Young © The British Museum.)