

## A Day at the Museum



The 7th December witnessed a school trip to Bristol, with visits to the Museum, the Cathedral and to M Shed, with lunch provided on College Green.



The dinosaurs also captured the imagination, particularly the *Scelidosaurus* with a little bit of skin and some sick to be seen! These were found at Charmouth, the heart of our Jurassic coastline.

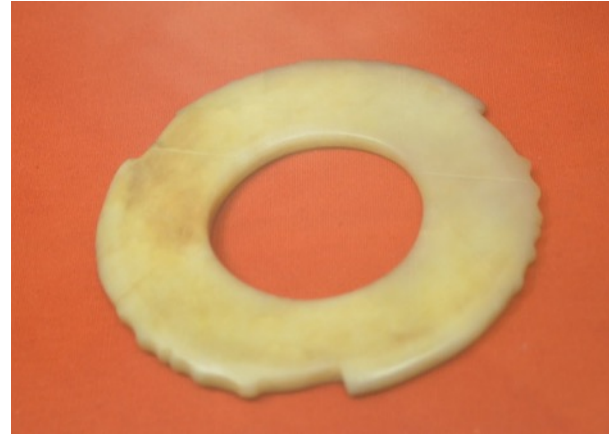
We had a little vote on the most inspiring artefact in the museum, and the winner, by an overwhelming minority, was the Neolithic notched bi disc.

Our first stop for the day was the Bristol Museum. The natural history section was clearly the most popular with its broad selection of stuffed animals from around the world. There was some interesting debate: is it OK to display animals in this rather antiquated way? Most of the exhibits are Victorian, or earlier. The consensus seemed to be that provided the exhibits were old, it was OK.

Two lucky groups of students visited the Chinese gallery with Mr Swann to see some fine Chinese Neolithic exhibits. Of particular interest were the Bi discs; one notched and one "un-notched". These are burial items of unknown function. We contemplated astronomical use in the context of the polar-centric view of the night sky in ancient China. We will be exploring this next term.

Another interesting observation was one of museum curatorship. In this case, the Museum had chosen to display the artefacts according to their form as opposed to function and chronology. We thus found contemporary and functionally identical artefacts in different parts of the museum. If we were the curators, we would have displayed the Neolithic artefacts together to tell a story of Neolithic (Xia and Shang) life and death.

Of course it wasn't - it only got one vote and the came from a teacher. The winner was this fellow:



Alfred the Gorilla, and in last place, our bi disc!

We had, in class, (MYP 1 and 2) discussed graffiti, art and vandalism. Admittedly this was in the context of the Upper Palaeolithic but it was good to see a rather more contemporary version of art, or perhaps vandalism, in the guise of a Banksy.

But most powerful of all was the "Empire through the lens" exhibition. Some challenging images of colonial times which covered both the slavery and empire topics that MYP 3 and 4 have been looking at this term.





Lunch was on College Green followed by a quick look in the Cathedral. Built in the twelfth century as an Augustine abbey we visited the oldest part - the Chapter House with its astonishing stonework. The Abbey was, unsurprisingly, dissolved in 1539 and the building reestablished as a cathedral in 1542, although much of the extant architecture is Victorian.

We could have used a little more time to think about architecture but we still had M Shed to visit. M Shed is part of Bristol Museum, but has a very different approach, deploying interaction and video to engage its visitors.

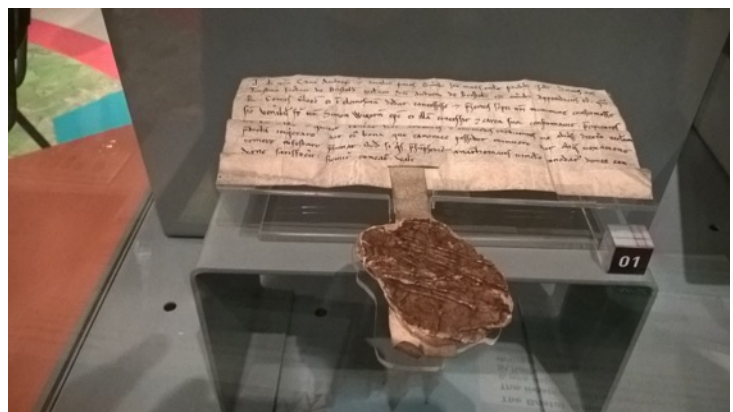
A priority for us was to see and debate the matter of slavery and the role Bristol played in this lucrative industry. Slavery was just a part of a broader global business but the wealth created is still manifested throughout Bristol today. It is found in architecture, particularly in Clifton, in schools and theatres, the legacy of philanthropists. There is debate today on whether these great benefactors of the city should be commemorated or erased from history. The response from our students was interesting - they had less interest in the business people but felt strongly that the enslaved people themselves are the ones that should be commemorated and remembered.



M Shed is full of amazing things from Roman tombstones to 1980's denim jackets. It is always a little unnerving to see things that were part of our own lives sitting in a glass museum cabinet, but it also provides the opportunity to discuss the exhibits from personal experience. So, yes, I have seen all the bands on the back of this jacket!



Going back a few years it was good to see the Curse of St. Ewen, one of the earliest extant documents relating to Bristol, from 1140 - roughly the same time the Chapter House in the Cathedral was built.



But it was, perhaps, the bus that provided the most entertainment for our group. And why not!

This was a splendid day out and was great to encounter exhibits that were pertinent to the history we have been working on this term as opposed to putting together a formal "tour". It made the experience spontaneous and thus enabled the students to make their own relevant discoveries.