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### Research Articles and Updates

#### The Class of 1951–2: The Institute of Archaeology and International Students

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# The Class of 1951–2: The Institute of Archaeology and International Students

*Alice Stevenson*

## Abstract

This research note aims to draw attention to a little-studied aspect in the history of archaeology: the relationship between university training and international students. The article provides a brief background to the social and political context of international student recruitment in the UK (principally, but not exclusively, from the Commonwealth) before turning to the status of museum training courses in the Institute in the 1950s, which, it is argued, was a key concern for students coming from abroad. Six of these students are then briefly introduced: Richard Nunoo (Ghana), Justus Dojuma Akeredólu (Nigeria), Mom Chao Subhadradis Diskul (Thailand), Syed Ashfaq Naqvi (Pakistan), Braj Basi Lal (India) and Bijan Bihari Lal (India).

**Keywords:** history of archaeology, museum studies, international students, archaeological training

## Introduction

Every Friday in the autumn of 1951, at 5.30 p.m., around 41 students assembled at St John's Lodge in London's Regents Park to receive

instruction in Field Archaeology. They dutifully recorded their presence on the class register and attentively made notes from their instructors, the latter including Gordon Childe, Mortimer Wheeler, Kathleen Kenyon and Max Mallowan. There are many familiar names on the class list, some of whom have written fond reminiscences of their years at the Institute, providing anecdotes featuring their renowned tutors (Thomas, Hutchinson and Gilbert 2013; Thomas 2012; Gathercole 2003; see also Davey 2016; Harris 2009; Steegstra 2018, 69–84). What is rarely remarked upon, however, other than in passing, is the starkly cosmopolitan make-up of the group.<sup>1</sup> There were individuals from Ghana, Pakistan, India, Thailand and Nigeria also present, students who themselves went on to have remarkable and influential careers.

Historical narratives concerning the development of archaeology in the Commonwealth have previously identified Cambridge as a ‘centre of prehistoric research in the Empire’ (Smith 2009, 36), built on Miles Burkitt’s conviction that Cambridge men would promote peace throughout Britain’s colonies during the course of their work. The subsequent ‘Cambridge diaspora’ (Smith 2009, 65) of students to Africa (see, for example, the likes of Thurstan Shaw and Desmond Clark) has been noted in this context. The history of the Institute of Archaeology (IoA) acts as counterpoint, not just in its education of white British students for work abroad, but for an insight into the work of international students who were enrolled in courses in London before returning to take up key heritage and archaeology positions in decolonising nations, notably in West Africa, as well as in South and Southeast Asia. And most of these graduates found employment in the museum sector, a profession for which students were well prepared for following their studies in the Institute, since fieldwork was only one component of a more diverse training than is perhaps recognised in the Institute’s history.

## Background

‘It will be a place equally available for students of all descriptions from all over the world and in all branches of archaeology.’ *The Times*, 28 April 1932

Of the post-war decade it has been said that the ‘Institute remained essentially a small research community somewhat isolated from the heart of the University in Bloomsbury’ where ‘some teaching’ (Harris 1997) was offered. However, even a cursory browse of the Institute’s attendance registers for that decade makes it clear that teaching was a heavy burden for the limited number of staff with a large cohort of students and multiple courses. In addition to Diploma students, MA and PhD candidates were accepted, while the programme also permitted drop-in students and, given the wide range of practical-based offerings, learners were able to tailor their courses to specialised methodological topics (Perry 2011, 51). For the 1951–2 academic year there were 22 students registered for Diplomas with an additional ‘14 students registered for higher degrees, including 2 from Pakistan, 2 from India, 1 from Siam and 1 from the United States’, while ‘six full-time students registered in the Technical Department, including students from the Sudan, Nigeria, Jordan, Greece and Australia’ (Childe 1952, 2).

That the largest proportion of foreign students in this year were from the Commonwealth, which had recently transitioned to a republican constitution by the London Declaration in 1949, parallels the broader demographic of student enrolment across the UK at this time. It has been estimated that by the beginning of 1950 around ten thousand students from the Commonwealth were studying in Britain. Of these, 1,713 attended universities and almost one-third were enrolled in London-based institutions (Lee 2006, 9). By the end of the 1950s some 2,881, or 11.5 per cent, of the student body in the University of London originated from the colonies or new Commonwealth (Stockwell 2008, 491). In part this can be attributed to the post-war Colonial Office,<sup>2</sup> which had sought to increase the flow of scholarships from the Commonwealth as a paternalistic means of fostering loyalty to Britain. For instance, in 1947 the African Studies Branch of the Colonial Office had emphasised the importance of ‘incorporating’ African students as future leaders (Hardgreaves 1993, 131).

There was considerable interest from students in such scholarships since, despite the fragmentation of the British Empire, colonial mentalities persisted, with study in the UK still seen as an attractive opportunity for those that could afford it. Large numbers of Indian students travelled to Britain in the 1950s, following decades in which employment in the

Indian government service was contingent upon British qualifications. While this was no longer the case in the era of decolonisation, studying in Britain retained its market appeal as a means of social advancement and many of these students in the 1950s had been brought up on British culture (Lahiri 2001, 209–10). For Nigerians – who were at that time yet to achieve independence – formal academic experience in London was a means to acquire not only official recognition of professional status, but also, more crucially, was a way of legitimising changes to government policy in Nigeria, including the colonial school curriculum (Oguibe 2002, 259). The metropole was a way of transforming their lives at home, rather than being a place to seek international recognition.

For archaeology specifically, several factors made the Institute of Archaeology an attractive prospect. One was the central figure of Mortimer Wheeler, whose previous positions and excavations in India and Pakistan in particular, paved the way for several individuals from Southeast Asia to study in London (see, for example, Guha 2003; Khan and Shaheen 2018). While practical fieldwork training was, at that time, a unique feature of the Institute's curriculum, it was the emphasis given to museum archaeology that was arguably of equal importance and value to students, given that there were few other opportunities to find professional employment in archaeology.

## Museum archaeology

The 'Fieldwork Archaeology' course was one of 22 classes offered by the Institute in 1951. Most sessions began at 5.30 p.m. to allow Diploma students with full-time jobs in the city or Civil Service to attend (Thomas 2012, 121). The class notes made by one student of the 1951 Fieldwork Archaeology cohort, George Dixon, have been reported and they record that it was

Childe who introduced Field Archaeology where he said that archaeologists discover 'documents' such as 'relics and monuments'. In following weeks Professor Wheeler (later Sir Mortimer) described the excavation and recording of stratigraphy, Miss Kenyon (later Dame Kathleen Kenyon) further developed

the subject of stratigraphy, Zeuner then dealt with soils, Professor Mallowan (later Sir Max) spoke about Mesopotamian conditions, Joan du Plat Taylor described the excavation of burials, Kenyon explained record taking and finally Wheeler discussed publication. (Davey 2016, 18)

However, while received wisdom might assume that the Institute was founded on fieldwork, training did not simply relate to digging. The very first classes from which the idea of the Institute arose were conducted in the Museum of London, where Wheeler was Keeper from 1926 to 1933 (Wheeler 1956, 85). When the Institute was being set up in the 1930s, an outstanding need was identified *both* ‘in field-archaeology and in museum-archaeology’:

In this connexion, it must be pointed out that the museum worker in archaeology is in need of training equally with the man in the field. Ideally, each should know something of the work of the other; and conditions similar to those which militate against the instruction of juniors in the elementary principles of practical archaeology while in the field are becoming increasingly prevalent in our museums. (Anon 1932, 702–3)

As such, the new Institute was to be:

a laboratory or workshop where pottery can be repaired, restored and drawn and objects of metal, etc, cleaned and preserved at a reasonable charge; and where instruction can be given in the elements of this work of reparation and record, in so far as is required by the field-archaeologists in the normal routine of his work.<sup>3</sup>

Subsequently, when *The Times* finally announced the opening of the Institute under the headline ‘Instruction in Archaeology’ in the 30 April 1937 issue, it was noted that students would find ‘three things’ in St John’s Lodge: ‘materials for study, instruction in the treatment of antiquities, and training in the archaeological method, in research, and in the recording of research’. These ends were met by the cornerstone

(politically and financially) of the fledgling IoA: its archaeological collections. Of these, the Petrie Palestinian collection was the most substantial and central (Ucko 1998; Sparks 2009).

Many of the courses that engaged with these collections were administered by the Institute's Technical Department, which accepted the highest numbers of drop-in students for the 1951–2 academic year: there were some 54 students registered that year (Childe 1952, 6). The 'repair and preservation of pottery and other archaeological finds' course was taught by Ione Geyde and had a broader curriculum than the title perhaps implied. For instance, Geyde would take students to London's major museums in order to see the 'behind-the-scenes working of institutions inclusive of conservation display, labelling and administration' (Perry 2011, 119). Staff of the British Museum and the London Museum also provided talks on exhibitionary methods (see, for example, Childe 1951). This, together with the exhibitions hosted in aid of the Institute and after its foundation, has led Perry to argue that exhibitions, museum collections and related pictorial outputs played a key role in the discipline's professional development (Perry 2011, 86–92).

The success of the Institute's classes in the area of museum practice attracted the interest of the UK's Museums Association, who approached the Institute in 1945 to enquire about what instruction might be provided to candidates for their Diploma. It was suggested that the Institute could offer technical training to all candidates and, to those without archaeological experience, the opportunity to study archaeology. The enquiry was seriously considered for several years, with a 'sub-committee on museology' appointed to examine the possibilities. While there was agreement that Museum Association Diploma candidates could join their archaeological programme<sup>4</sup> and a syllabus was drafted, larger plans to establish a Diploma in Museum Studies were eventually dropped.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, many future museum professionals came through the IoA, where it was the Technical Department of the IoA that largely managed the demand 'for the training of those who are to join museum staffs' (Childe 1950, 1). Peter Gathercole, who studied at the Institute from 1952 to 1954 (Gathercole 2003), was one such student who became a museum employee and noted that he would 'continually use my notes from almost all the courses; the courses on technology, repair and preservation, chemistry etc. were most useful in museum work'.<sup>6</sup>

For international students, particularly those of the former Empire where national museums had been established (see MacKenzie 2009), accredited training with collections was a high priority. A report produced for the Institute in 1954 recognised this, commenting specifically that in ‘the Technical Departments, in addition to instruction prescribed for Diploma Courses, training is provided for non-graduate students who aim at technical posts in museums, and besides natives of Britain, colonial and dominion students are sent by their Governments to take these courses.’<sup>7</sup> A significant number over the years came from India and Pakistan, where Mortimer Wheeler had been instrumental in establishing Museum Associations in both countries; in India a museums branch of the Archaeological Survey in India was formed in 1946, while Pakistan’s Museum Association was founded in 1949 with Wheeler as its President (Khan and Shaheen 2018, 184). Museum development in West Africa, similarly, arose through local actors and contexts, influenced but not driven by an overarching colonial agenda (Basu 2012).

The trend of seeking training in museum studies in the UK at this time fits into a broader picture. As Claire Wintle (2017) has highlighted, despite the characterisation of Britain’s post-war museum sector as a period of stagnation, under the surface of apparent inertia was an active network of placements for foreign museum practitioners across UK Museums (see also Longair and McAleer 2012). This is reflected in the comments of Institute staff. Professor Frederick Zeuner, who was primarily responsible for the Institute’s Environmental archaeology courses, noted that he had ‘been asked repeatedly whether students were available to fill Museum posts in the Empire’.<sup>8</sup> Several of the international students who studied at the Institute had in fact already held museum positions in their home countries prior to arriving. Alongside their training at the Institute they acquired additional experience at the British Museum and through the Museum Association’s Diploma.

## Class members, 1951–2

The below gives some brief biographical vignettes on six international alumni of the 1951–2 Institute of Archaeology cohort, whose careers it has been possible to trace in order to highlight the role that museum

archaeology played in their training and professional lives. While there are several female students in the registration list, including Isobel Smith who undertook substantial work at Avebury,<sup>9</sup> none were from overseas. These biographies are cursory at present, but it is hoped this can be a foundation for future research.

Justus Dojuma Akeredólu (1915–83) was first and foremost an artist from southwestern Nigeria, who in the 1930s was a crafts teacher in government-run schools in Nigeria. He was awarded a Nigerian Government scholarship in the early 1950s that allowed him to travel throughout Europe and undertake study at a number of London institutions, including the British Museum, the Hammersmith School of Arts and Crafts and the Institute of Archaeology, where his focus was museum technology. It was a scholarship contingent on returning to work for the government antiquities department (Willett 1986, 50), in effect a form of colonial philanthropy. In the Institute's Technical Department Akeredólu focused on model-making (see also Perry 2013) and 'under the guidance of Miss Geyde and the excavator' built 'a very instructive scale model of the "Neolithic" chambered cairn of Quoyness, Sanday, Orkney'; it was exhibited at the Institute before being sold to the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland (Childe 1953, 2; Childe and Akeredólu 1953). Most immediately after returning from London, Akeredólu secured a post as technical instructor in the Nigerian Museum in Lagos. He joined Goodwin and Bernard Fagg on excavation in Nigeria in the mid-1950s, with responsibility for pottery reconstruction (Shepherd 2003). Thereafter he worked as an assistant curator in Ife Museum before becoming Curator of the Owo Museum. Today he is remembered not as an archaeologist, but as a highly acclaimed first-generation modern Nigerian artist, being famed as an originator of widely collected miniature tree thorn carvings (Willett 1986).

Mom Chao Subhadradis Diskul (1923–2003) was the son of Prince Damrong Rajanubhab. His original academic interests were in the history of Thailand before working through the Ministry of Education to the Fine Arts Department Archives Section (Bacus and Shoocongdej 2004). He studied at the Ecole du Louvre in 1951 prior to undertaking his Diploma in Archaeology at the Institute. On his return to Thailand in 1953, he became curator of the Department of Archaeology at the Fine Arts Department. Here, in addition to researching Thai archaeological

materials, he had responsibility for establishing several new museums across Thailand.<sup>10</sup>

Braj Basi Lal (1922–) is the only individual in this discussion not to fit this profile of a developing museum professional, nor did he require fieldwork training (which is probably why he only came to a single lecture in the Fieldwork class, but attended several other IoA courses). Lal was already a very experienced archaeologist and relatively well-advanced in his career by the time he arrived in London for advanced study in archaeology. He first undertook fieldwork as a trainee at Mortimer Wheeler's training excavations at Taxila in 1944 (Guha 2003) and subsequently worked under Wheeler at Arikamedu (1945) and Brahmagiri (1947). By 1946 he was assistant superintendent of the Archaeological Survey of India in charge of the Excavations Branch, and during his enrolment in the University of London he had responsibilities for excavations at Hastināpura (Lal 1955). He directed many excavations of his own (see Coningham and Young 2015, 83–4), culminating in his service as Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) (1968–72). He was joined at the Institute in 1951 by fellow ASI employee Bijan Bihari Lal (1913–2000), who had been ‘deputed to the Institute of Archaeology, London for study of Geo-chronology, a subject he introduced later in the Chemistry Branch [of the ASI]’ (Bhatnagar 2000).

Syed Ashfaq Naqvi (1922–2006) was awarded a Nuffield Foundation Research Fellowship for higher studies at the University of London in 1949. The National Museum of Pakistan in Karachi had been founded in 1950 with Naqvi as its director, the same year in which the Museum Association of Pakistan was established with Mortimer Wheeler as its first president (Bhatti 2012, 257, note 10). He became General Director of Pakistan's Department of Archaeology and Museums, a position he held until 1972, after which he joined UNESCO's Division for the Development of Cultural Heritage (Naviq 1973).

Richard Nunoo (1922–2007) has been described as Ghana's first Indigenous archaeologist (Kense 1990, 145), responsible for the excavation of several sites in Ghana (Nunoo 1948; 1959). He had already held curatorial positions managing the Achimota College collections (at Legon in Ghana, the forerunner of the National Museum)

before travelling to London to study at the Institute for the Diploma in Prehistoric Archaeology, as well as for the Museum Association's Diploma. In the latter capacity he became a temporary assistant at the British Museum in 1954. He then returned to Ghana to take up various positions in the National Museum before becoming its Director in 1961 as part of his larger responsibilities as Director of Ghana Museums and Monuments (Nunoo 1965; 2001). In this role Nunoo was the first black African museum director in sub-Saharan Africa.

## Discussion

What sort of knowledge was produced and reproduced in these encounters? How was that experience transformed when students returned home? Was it transformational for the students who undertook such training? In the case of B.B. Lal he became the first director of India's new School of Archaeology, an organisation that explicitly developed Wheeler's archaeological curriculum for the Institute of Archaeology (Carruthers 2019). However, this was not a simple implantation of the methodologies instilled in Wheeler's students, as Sheena Panja (2002) has noted. Rather, archaeology in post-partition Indian occupied a more ambivalent third space (Bhabha 1994), wherein a mix of acceptance and rejection of British approaches characterised the development of the discipline, with the positivistic ethos promulgated by Wheeler co-opted to the service of Hindu nationalism as 'an attempt to reject the oppressiveness of colonial archaeology' (see Johnson-Roehr 2008, 513). For those employed in the museum sector, national agendas equally shaped practice as countries gained independence from Britain, such as Nunoo's development of contemporary collecting for the National Museum (Nunoo 2001).

Justus Akeredólu emerges shortly after his time in the Institute in the archives of John Goodwin's 1955 fieldwork in Nigeria, where the evidence suggests his status in the eyes of colonial archaeologists was not altered by his educational achievements. From letters and photographs in the Goodwin archive of the University of Cape Town, the ongoing colonial relations of work, stereotypes and paternalistic rhetoric are starkly apparent (Shepherd 2003). Akeredólu was one of a small

team who were described dismissively as black ‘workers’ employed by Goodwin, and Akeredólu, despite his qualifications and experience, was viewed by Goodwin as someone ‘who has little power to think things out’ and as ‘essentially an artistic craftsman’. That ‘craftsman’ is remembered as a pioneering contemporary artist (Ikpakronyi 2002) who now has his thorn carvings represented in museum collections worldwide. They feature in the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology,<sup>11</sup> the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences,<sup>12</sup> and the Hunterian Museum in Glasgow, among others, while the list of international exhibits featuring his work is extensive.<sup>13</sup>

What is missing from this account are the experiences of the international students themselves and information about the social networks within which their lives at the IoA were but one part. Reminiscences from white students of the time are warm and nostalgic. Whether the same experience was shared should be questioned, as contemporary studies and observations suggest students experienced racism, prejudice and hardship. Segregation of student accommodation had only recently been abolished (for example, London House in Mecklenburgh Square did not accept students of colour until 1949), while the quality of life in London disappointed many (Stockwell 2008). Surveys of the experiences of colonial students were produced in the mid-1950s, revealing prejudice and ignorance across British society and recording the disillusionment of visiting students and the discrimination they faced (see, for example, Singh 1963; Braithwaite 2001). This is perhaps why B.B. Lal makes no mention of his time at the Institute in his autobiography (Lal 2011). Contemporary accounts of life in London from Akeredólu’s fellow Nigerian scholarship recipient, Akinola Lasekan (who Akeredólu travelled with), are equally damning; he was both ‘disgusted’ with and ‘disappointed’ by England (Oguibe 2002, 259).

## Concluding thoughts

The class of 1951–2 provides just one snapshot of the demographics of the Institute’s diverse student body in the 1950s. Looking further through the registers at previous and subsequent years, a similar cosmopolitan profile is evident, with notable names including Thabit Hassan

Thabit, future commissioner of archaeology in Sudan (IoA 1949–50); F.A. Ghosh (IoA 1948–9), Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India; and Ekpo Eyou (IoA 1957–8), the first Nigerian director of the Federal Department in Nigeria and subsequently director general of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments. Their presence in the Institute's archives is fleeting, signatures and ticks on a register, and the project of contextualising their experiences and career trajectories from their time here remains to be realised. As historians of archaeology move from individual biographies towards more nuanced understandings of scientific networks in the creation of knowledge (see, for example, Roberts and Sheppard 2020), such registers potentially offer a valuable departure point for thinking more expansively about international links and lives.

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## Conflict of interests

The author is the current Editor of the journal and was sufficiently blinded from the review and editorial decision process.

## Notes

- 1 These passing comments include this from former student Jay Butler, one of those listed on the 1951–2 Fieldwork class register: ‘Jay remembered that it was especially the Indian students who prepared delicious meals for very little money’ (Steegstra 2018, 75).
- 2 In the early 1950s major shifts in the administration and support of these students occurred, with responsibility for their welfare transferred from the Colonial Office to the British Council. British Council records of this period are currently closed to public access.

- 3 Institute of Archaeology, University of London, Memorandum on Policy Management Committee Minutes, Monday 8 June 1936.
- 4 Institute of Archaeology, Management Committee Minutes, 5 February 1946, p. 3. In 1950 four Museum Association Diploma candidates undertook a special course (Childe 1950, 1).
- 5 Institute of Archaeology, Management Committee Minutes, 26 October 1949.
- 6 Peter Gathercole to Edward Pyddoke, 30 July 1959, John Evans Archive, Institute of Archaeology.
- 7 University of London, Institute of Archaeology, Information and Statistics prepared for the University Grants Committee c.1954, IoA archives.
- 8 IoA Management Committee minutes, 29 October 1947: Memo on the Teaching Requirements of the Department of Environmental Archaeology.
- 9 National Trust, *Breaking Ground: Female archaeologists at Avebury* <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/avebury/features/breaking-ground-female-archaeologists-at-avebury> (accessed 1 September 2020).
- 10 <http://fukuoka-prize.org/en/laureate/prize/gra/diskul.php> (accessed 24 January 2020).
- 11 <https://hearstmuseum.berkeley.edu/tourist-arts-yoruba/> (accessed 26 January 2020).
- 12 <https://collection.maas.museum/object/371610> (accessed 26 January 2020).
- 13 <https://blerf.org/index.php/biography/akeredolu-j-d/> (accessed 26 January 2020).

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