

“Forget Hargrove. Read Vere Gordon Childe...”



Vere Gordon Childe

Before Indiana Jones, there was Vere Gordon Childe. The great man – Indiana Jones – recommends him to his students as he skids across a library on the back of a motorbike, but not even he had access to the Vere Gordon Childe Teaching Collection.

The Vere Gordon Childe Teaching Collection is a unique collection. Not only due to the interesting and varied objects it is composed of but also due to its connection with one of the pre-eminent names in the archaeology of British prehistory, and its use to teach generations of University of Edinburgh students. Recently, a group of seven archaeology students supervised by James Harvie (HCA Ancient History and Classical Archaeology alumnus) worked on the Vere Gordon Childe collection over three weeks, checking condition and doing preventative conservation work on the artefacts.

“We’re continuing in the footsteps of a long line of volunteers in caring for and researching the objects in this

fascinating collection,” said James Harvie. “Our goal during our time with the collection is to create condition reports for the objects within the collection, identify any objects in need of conservation treatment, and continue some of the projects started by previous volunteers, such as creating appropriate storage conditions.”

An example of the kind of work undertaken are three Egyptian copper alloy statuettes, attached via wires to an information card (likely done in the early years of the collection). The wires were rubbing against and damaging the copper alloy, as well as preventing the students from giving a complete condition report. The statuettes were carefully removed from their backing, allowing them to complete the condition report, then repacked in a more appropriate manner with acid-free tissue paper and silica gel. As the information card is itself an interesting part of the history of both the collection as a whole and those specific objects, this too was repackaged and placed alongside the statuettes.



A student, wearing latex gloves examines the statuettes.



The statuettes on the original card, the wire ties visible.



Two of the statuettes are removed from the card.



All three statuettes removed from the card, their outlines clearly visible on the original card.

“As a a graduate of the School I knew of and had an interest in this collection, so I got in touch with Dr Guillaume Robin (the current custodian of the collection) to offer my help with its conservation, whilst back in Edinburgh for my summer holidays. This is a great opportunity for myself working with the Vere Gordon Childe Collection, whilst also being able to offer students an insight into the world of conservation. Our thanks go to AOC Archaeology who kindly donated some of the supplies we used in the work.”

You can find out more about the collection and view items with in here – Vere Gordon Childe Collection – and more about his work at the University of Edinburgh here, the tradition of archaeology at Edinburgh.