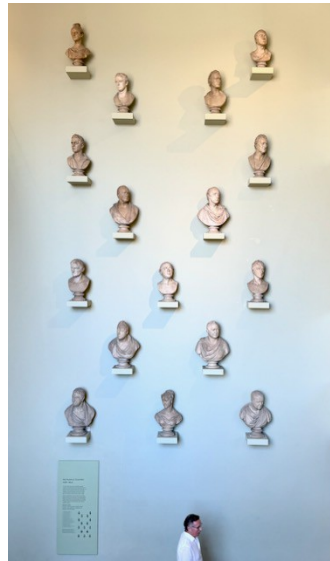


Meeting 4: Thursday 16th July 2026

Visit to the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

Ten members attended this visit. The museum has recently been refurbished and extended very successfully with a design by Rick Mather Architects. The result is a bright, modern interior behind the famous Victorian facade, with exceptionally well presented exhibits. Many of us felt we should return soon to look around some of the other galleries. We had a guided tour of the European Prehistory and the Egyptian and Sudanese galleries, led by Jude, a very enthusiastic and personable guide.

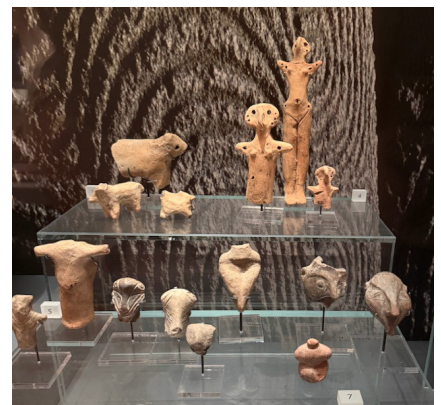
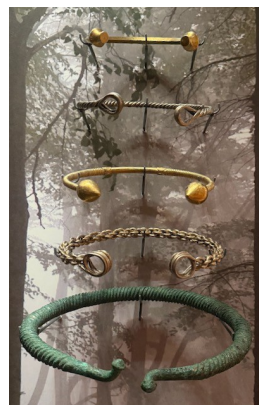


European Prehistory

The museum's collection is one of the finest and most comprehensive in the country, especially for the antiquities of northern Europe. Before Roman times, there was no written record, so archaeology is the key source for this period. There is evidence for the exchange of raw materials like metals, amber and salt at this time, and for waves of new cultures spreading across Europe from the Middle East.

Jude showed us a display of Neolithic jadeite axe heads from the Western Alps found from Scotland to Sicily, illustrating that people moved long distances during the Neolithic Period. We also looked at the development of ceramics by the Beaker people, first as religious objects then for everyday use. The spread through Europe was much earlier than in the UK, where the culture only arrived around 2500 BC. Cauldrons and horns show that feasting and music were important to these societies. We also saw examples of jewellery and metalwork including gold torcs and shallow bronze vessels though to be used for divination. Examples of prehistoric tools and weapons are displayed such as deer antlers which were adapted to be used as picks, and delicately made stone arrow heads.

[Visit the galleries online](#)



Egyptian galleries

This extensive collection is one of the biggest in Britain and we were given a tour of the highlights. In pride of place at the start are the predynastic discoveries of Flinders Petrie, including monumental stone figures of the fertility god Min (3300 BCE) (and there's no doubt he's a fertility god!). Though still a hunter-gatherer society they had time to create these enormous statues – start of a long tradition. There are many other ritual and decorative items from this period. Later galleries demonstrate the rise of a hierarchical society during the dynastic period. The centrepiece is the Shrine of Taharqa, the only free-standing Kushite monument in Britain (680 BCE) from Kawa in Nubia, built in honour of the god Amun. There are also a statues of a lion (c. 2300-2200BCE) and of the crocodile god Sobek (c. 1800 BCE).

Another gallery is devoted to the extraordinary rituals associated with death, including a well displayed nest of coffins for a royal mummy, complete with elaborate jewellery and decorations; and models of essentials needed beyond the grave, including a brewery, boats and magical servants.

A final section covers the Greek and Roman period, where north Mediterranean and Egyptian traditions became merged.

[Visit the galleries online](#)



In Bloom

Some members also visited the In Bloom exhibition, a fascinating description of the way early scientific methods were employed from the 17th century onwards to fan out across the globe in search of exotic plants, starting with Oxford's own Tradescants, father and son. [Read their story.](#) Huge volumes of meticulously painted and engraved images of various discoveries are included. The exhibition continues until 16th August.

For members who were unable to attend, I strongly recommend the museum. If you can't get there in person, they also have a really excellent website. Click the links above to see more details of the galleries we visited.



Next month

Wednesday 19th August: I'm planning a tour of archaeological sites in and around the City of London. This will be limited to 15 members. I'll issue details and a sign up sheet in the next week or so.

Later meetings

Fri 18th September (revised date): Visit to and expert led tour of the replica Bayeux Tapestry at Reading Museum, plus a visit and introductory talk about the museum's archaeological collection.

Wed 14th October: We're looking for a member to give a short talk about an archaeological site they have visited. If you'd be interested in doing this, please get in touch.

Later proposed events are listed on our webpage: [click link here](#).

What'sApp

We have a What'sApp group for members where we post news and interesting related information. If you'd like to join let me know

Keith Mason
Group coordinator
archaeology.iu3a@gmail.com
20 July 2026