Archaeological Institute of America
Elizabeth Bartman Museum Internship
Fund Report

Alexis Jordan

2016
Grantee: Alexis Jordan, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Internship Location: Royal Cornwall Museum, Great Britain

Period of Internship: July 1- September 6, 2016

Funding Provided: $2000

Supervisor: Sara Chambers, Exhibitions and Collections Manager

Internship Focus: Organization, inventory and analysis of the Harlyn Bay skeletal collection

Grantee in the Collections of the Royal Cornwall Museum
Introduction

With the assistance of the Elizabeth Bartman Museum Internship Fund I completed a ten-week collections internship at the Royal Cornwall Museum under the supervision of the Exhibitions and Collections Manager, Sara Chambers. My work focused on the re-housing, inventory, and analysis of the commingled human remains collection from the site of Harlyn Bay, a Cornish Iron Age cemetery (c. 1st century BCE-1st century CE) excavated between 1900-1905 (Figure 1). As the largest Iron Age cemetery in Cornwall, Harlyn Bay is a key site in my dissertation project, which focuses on the construction of cultural identities in the Pre-Roman and Roman Iron Ages (800 BCE-CE 400) in Cornwall (southwestern Britain) through the analysis of mortuary ritual and human remains.

Internship Goals

Sparse excavation records by antiquarian excavators, the re-housing of the Royal Cornwall Museum’s collections during a move to a new facility in 1918, as well as subsequent moves between storage rooms in the proceeding decades, and the early use of the collection by antiquarian scholars led to the disassociation of the skeletal remains from records of specific burial contexts. In addition, the resulting commingling of skeletal elements from multiple individuals has significantly reduced the research value of this important assemblage of skeletal...
material. Consequently, despite Harlyn Bay’s importance for our understanding of Iron Age Cornwall, this collection has been studied on a very limited scale. With the aid of the Elizabeth Bartman Museum Internship Fund and my background and expertise in skeletal analyses and collections organization and management, I was able to make significant progress on the unmingling of the skeletal remains and the identification of individuals as well as the creation of a comprehensive collection inventory and biological profiles for individuals in conducting skeletal analyses to determine age, sex, and the identification of pathologies.

The results of these analyses will be used to identify demographic patterns within the population that can be linked to expressions of cultural identity within mortuary practices, such as differences in the burial program and/or the inclusion/exclusion within the cemetery for particular subsets of the population (e.g. men vs. women, children vs. adults) which will be included in my dissertation research. In addition, this internship has allowed me to gain collections experience in Great Britain as well as allowing me to expand my skeletal expertise with commingled human remains collections. This is particularly significant as I intend to pursue employment as a collections manager and/or curator focused on the care of human remains and European archaeological collections upon completion of my doctoral degree.

**Expenses**

The Elizabeth Bartman Museum Internship Fund was key in covering the cost of travel to and from Cornwall as well as assisting me in offsetting the high cost of living in the UK for an extended period of time (July 1 – September 6, 2016). Specifically the funding covered my airfare and train transportation to and from Truro, Cornwall, and a small portion of my grocery expenses (Table 1). Thanks to the generosity of a local historian, Dr. Joanna Mattingly, I had free
housing for the entirety of my trip and consequently I was able to extend my internship from 8 weeks to 10. Thus the only portion of the project that was self-funded was the majority of the grocery bill.

Table 1: Internship Expenses Funded by the Archaeological Institute of America

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Airfare</td>
<td>$1235.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roundtrip Chicago to London, June 2016</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation to/from Truro, England</td>
<td>$175.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roundtrip train from London to Truro</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groceries</td>
<td>$589.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>$2000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Pending current Pound exchange rates; receipts available upon request

Activities & Results

My collections internship at the Royal Cornwall Museum consisted of a number of steps to facilitate the inventory and analysis of the Harlyn Bay collection. My internship began with an extensive meeting with Sara Chambers to discuss the museum’s preferences in tracking and recording the re-housing, reorganization, and analysis of the collection. From there I developed a procedure that would allow me to re-associate, inventory, analyze, label, and re-bag the collection in a manner keeping with the museum’s collections policies as well as the analytical needs of my dissertation research. As
part of this preliminary step of my project I reviewed my notes and photos from my preliminary viewings of the collection in previous years, researched UK museum best practices for the storage of human remains, and developed standardized curatorial labels for each bag as well as commingled skeletal analysis forms that could adequately capture all aspects of the inventory and analysis (e.g. Figure 2).

Next I reviewed all available database records and archival documentation to determine if any excavation or curation records would aid me in individuating the commingled remains and/or re-associating them with specific burial contexts. During this stage of the internship I reached out to another archaeologist who had conducted research and additional excavations at the site in the 1970s, Dr. Rowan Whimster. With his assistance I was able to obtain copies of previously missing excavation records. I also worked with a library volunteer and Dr. Mattingly to accurately transcribe a handwritten skeletal inventory and the newly located excavation records written in 1900.

My review of the archival material as well as my preliminary notes and photos regarding the notations written on/within storage containers and the remains aided me in identifying a subset of boxes within the collection that contained notable disparities (compared to the majority of the collection) in terms of the physical condition of the remains. This suggested a possible discrepancy in origin or history of some of the remains. These disparities included: excellent bone preservation inconsistent with remains that had spent 2000+ years in a sand burial context; numbers written on crania, attempts at cranial reconstruction involving glue and tape, and evidence of (likely) antiquarian craniotomies that were not present in the majority of the collection; and the observation of intentional cranial deformation in at least 2 crania, a cultural practice not known anywhere in Iron Age Europe. Consequently I sought the assistance of some
additional members of the museum staff. This involved: interviewing a former museum curator with extensive knowledge of the history of collections movements and rehousing; acquiring a portable UV light to read a faded label glued to one of the intentionally deformed crania which identified it as belonging to a New Hebrides collection; and obtaining assistance to review the database and archival records for skeletal collections listed as missing in the museum database to cross-reference them against those remains I suspected did not originate from Harlyn Bay. Ultimately I was able to determine that a subset of the Harlyn Bay collection had been mixed with other human remains collections previously identified as missing. Thankfully this subset accounts for approximately only 1/5 of the entire collection. Upon identifying the extent of the problem and consulting with Sara Chambers, I opted to focused my individuation, inventory, analysis, and re-bagging on the unaffected 4/5 of the collection.

My skeletal analysis of the Harlyn Bay collection consisted of the following steps: 1) the re-association of fragments from individual skeletal elements; 2) the re-association skeletal elements through various commingled analytical techniques including joint re-articulation and the visual matching of paired elements through a comparison of their size, shape, and the placement of various morphological features; 3) inventorying all elements present recording the re-association of any set of elements; 4) recording biological data such as age, sex, and the presence of pathologies for all elements (where possible); 5) recording of any visible taphonomic changes (alterations to the bone that occurred post-mortem) such as extensive deterioration or discoloration caused by contact with a
metal object; 6) calculation of the minimum number of individuals present based on the inventory and biological data obtained; 7) and re-bagging and labeling of the remains based on the re-association of fragments and elements in accordance with the museum’s policies (Figure 3). Upon completion of my internship I had identified 12 individuals including 1 child, 10 adults (including 2 women) and 1 individual of indeterminate age or sex.

**Future Research Goals**

While my discovery that a subset of the Harlyn Bay collection had been commingled with other collections was a vital piece of information that prevented me from mistakenly analyzing unrelated skeletal remains, it was also a time consuming component of my internship. Consequently I did not complete my analysis of Harlyn Bay collection. Therefore, I intend to return to the Royal Cornwall Museum in January of 2017 to complete my skeletal re-association, inventory, analysis, and re-bagging of the Harlyn Bay collection (focused on the majority that is unaffected by commingling with other collections). A University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Graduate School Distinguished Dissertator Fellowship that I have obtained for the 2016-2017 academic year will fund this next phase of the project. In the interim I will continue to review scans of the archival documents I obtained to determine if I can identify which remains are from Harlyn Bay amongst the multi-collection commingled boxes and to determine if I can re-associate any of the Harlyn Bay remains I have thus far analyzed with specific burial context documentation.

Upon completion of this portion of my dissertation research, I will then be able to determine which individuals from Harlyn Bay I will sample for subsequent chemical analyses to explore differences in date, diet, and mobility amongst these individuals via various isotopic
analyses and radiocarbon dating. This will allow me to continue to explore potential population differences and how they relate to the burial program within the cemetery.

**Conclusion**

With the help of the Elizabeth Bartman Museum Internship Fund I was able to gain valuable collections experience and make great progress in conducting analysis on a key component of my dissertation research. In aiding me to work towards the completion of this project the fund has also aided the Royal Cornwall Museum in making the Harlyn Bay collection more accessible for future scholars.

*The Royal Cornwall Museum owns all copyright to photos of their collections. Images of human remains were excluded from this report for this reason and because of the sensitive nature of such collections. Additional photos can be given provided that the Royal Cornwall Museum will grant permission.*