

# M ICOM-CC

ICOM  
international council  
of museums – committee  
for conservation



## Archaeological Materials & Sites

## Newsletter No. 2, March 2020

### FROM THE COORDINATOR - Emma Hocker

Dear Colleagues,

This newsletter comes to you in the midst of the Corona-virus pandemic, a truly unprecedented and uncertain time for us all. First of all, I hope that you and your loved ones remain safe, and that the disruption to your lives is minimal, though I appreciate that long-term planning may be very difficult. Although forced to close, many museums and heritage sites have also been offering webinars, virtual museum tours and the like to attract visitors by digital means. I encourage you to explore these creative solutions, especially if you, like me, are having to social distance and work from home! Despite all the negative news, it has been heartening to see how the conservation community across the globe has been responding, by offering protective equipment to those on the frontline or by making batches of hand sanitizer.

Now for some good news. The ICOM-CC Board has informed me that our group has been approved for full Working Group status (until now, our status had been provisional). This is a direct result of the huge interest shown by you, our members, which has clearly demonstrated the need for such a group. Just a few numbers: officially, we are 63 members representing 23 different countries (those of you who have contacted me requesting to become members).

Otherwise, we have 560 followers on Facebook! For the Triennial Conference, we received well over 40 submissions, many more than some of the more established Working Groups. Unfortunately, due to a very tight program, it will not be possible to publish all these papers in the Preprints. However, with the author's agreement, it may be possible to publish these papers in future newsletters.

In this issue of our newsletter, Assistant Coordinator Vivian Smits reports on a conservation conference that took place in southern Sweden in November 2019. Vivian also gives an overview of her doctoral studies, examining the dilemmas and consequences of current archaeological practice in Sweden. I suspect that this will resonate with many of you around the world, so please do share your experiences or comments directly with Vivian or via our Facebook page. It would be great to start a dialogue and to hear what is happening in other countries.

To recap on other news in the museum world, many of you will be aware that the wording for a new museum definition was discussed at the ICOM meeting in Kyoto last autumn but since there was no agreement, the decision has been postponed to June 2020.

ICOM has also approved the creation of two new International Committees from September 2019: the ICOM International Committee on Disaster Resilient Museums (DRMC) and the ICOM International Committee on Ethical Dilemmas (ICEthics). It seems to me that many of the issues facing members of our Working Group might well fit into these new committees'

mandates, so I encourage you to follow their discussions.

Once again, stay safe, try to remain positive and make the most of this unexpected time to read articles, organize your photographs and files, plan research projects and appreciate the good things in life!

### Statement from the ICOM-CC Chair

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Regarding the Triennial Conference in Beijing, the ICOM-CC Board issued the following statement on 27 March 2020:

*We understand many of you may have concerns about the coronavirus (COVID-19) and how that may affect the ICOM-CC Triennial Conference planned for Beijing in September.*

*ICOM-CC and the Beijing National Organizing team are monitoring the COVID-19 situation, which is changing very rapidly at present. In many parts of the world, there are various levels of restrictions in place that affect travel in general. As this is a rapidly-evolving situation, it is not possible to provide advice about travel in*

*September - nor to speculate about the prospect that the ICOM-CC Triennial Conference may be amended or postponed.*

*We will at all times place the health and safety of ICOM-CC delegates at the forefront of our decision-making. We will follow the advice of the World Health Organisation.*

*We assure everyone that we will keep you informed and updated as plans develop. We would like for this conference to be as robust, impactful and safe as possible.*

### Call for Candidates for Working Group Coordinator

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I would like to remind you that the Call for Candidates for Working Group Coordinator is open (available for download on <http://www.icom-cc.org/54/document/?id=1696#.Xm-lQKhKhPZ>).

If you are interested in standing for this role - and I do encourage you to do so - you must submit your candidacy by **Monday 25 May 2020**. Further details regarding the Coordinator's duties can be found in the above link.

Members will be asked to vote during the period Monday 31 August through to Tuesday 15 September 2020.

Beyond the Coordinator's role, there are many other ways to contribute to the Working Group: volunteering as an Assistant Coordinator, collating and editing information for newsletters; gathering and sharing information on specific conservation projects; co-organising workshops, monitoring social media; and so on. Any assistance would be greatly appreciated, so please contact me at [emma.hocker@gustavianum.uu.se](mailto:emma.hocker@gustavianum.uu.se) if you would like to assist in any of these areas.

## Archaeology and Analysis - Conference Report

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Vivian Smits, Assistant Coordinator, Sweden

The regional organisation for conservation in west Sweden, Studio Västsvensk Konservering (SVK), organises conferences on different topics on a regular basis. During fall 2019, the conference *Archaeology and Analysis* – financed by the Swedish National Heritage Board and hosted by the Graduate School in Contract Archaeology (GRASCA) at Linneaus University – took place in Kalmar, southern Sweden.

Bringing together professionals from different disciplines outside of the usual contractor/sub-contractor situation of development-led archaeology, the conference served the purpose of a forum where praxis, theory and applied knowledge were able to meet. Besides archaeologists, a wide range of actors within archaeology were represented, such as County Board antiquarians, representatives from the Swedish Transport Administration, conservators, osteologists, experts in archaeometallurgy, paleobotanists, and geoscientists.

The conference was organised by themes in order to cover a variety of topics: laboratory-based archaeology, computer science & technology, and the archaeology of the dead. A fourth and final theme – material science & conservation – provided room for conservation professionals to present and discuss how conservation practice generates valuable knowledge for archaeologists and archaeological science.

Conservator Lovisa Dal from the Historical Museum at Lund University presented her work with the Sösdala hoard – an archaeological deposition find of equestrian accoutrements dating to the early 5th century, and the origin of the “sösdala-untersieberbrunn” style<sup>1</sup>. Dal explained how careful cleaning and meticulous microscopic analysis of punchmarks provided knowledge, not only on stamp technique and craftsmanship, but also on the number of sets of tools used, as well as the number of individual designs stamped on the nearly 250 separate parts of the hoard. It also revealed that one particular piece was a copy, perhaps crafted to replace a lost part.

Professor Elizabeth E. Peacock from the NTNU University Museum in Norway talked about how insights from archaeological conservation can shed light on glacial archaeological research questions. Her presentation contained examples on artefacts recovered on Svalbard and from perennial high-mountain ice patches in Central Norway<sup>2</sup>. Peacock explained how artefacts can be used as potential sources of information containing data on manufacturing, use, re-use, alteration and disposal; information which can be revealed and preserved by means of conservation. However, she argued, that in these particular cases, it is the conservators’ extended knowledge about environmental effects on materials, in combination with knowledge on natural deterioration processes, which are invaluable.

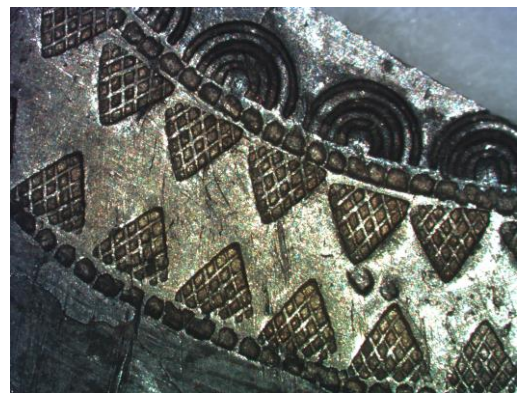
*“The conservator’s knowledge of complexity and interactivity enables them to help make sense of artefacts. In this respect, conservation can contribute in a substantive way to a wider cultural and archaeological interpretation of this material”* (Peacock, conference abstract 2019).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00293652.2019.1669700?af=R&journalCode=sarc20> (retrieved 2020-02-24).

<sup>2</sup> Analysis on the deterioration of wooden projective shafts was carried out within the Snow Patch Archaeological Research Cooperation (SPARC) project, <https://www.ntnu.edu/museum/sparc>.

SVK hopes to be able to follow-up on this successful concept in the near future, as the conference was highly appreciated by both participants and presenters.



Horse bridle reconstruction and detail of stamp technique (courtesy: Lovisa Dal).

### Making heritage. A short overview of an ongoing research project

Vivian Smits, Assistant Coordinator, Sweden.

I am grateful for the opportunity to publish a short overview of my PhD project *Making Heritage*<sup>3</sup>, in this newsletter. This overview covers the first part of the project, which is published as a licentiate thesis (in Swedish, but with an English summary at the end) at:

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:lnu:diva-89291>

Having worked as an archaeological conservator for more than a decade, I have come to realize that co-operation between professions is hardly a matter of course, while communication between them is often non-existent. In my PhD project, I am investigating the reasons why this occurs, the consequences, and how the situation can be turned around in order to provide cultural heritage of relevance to society, as stipulated in official goals for the heritage sector, namely to function as a dynamic, challenging, and independent driving force, working for the improvement and enrichment of society<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Smits, V. (2019). *Att skapa ett kulturarv*. LNU licentiate, no. 26. Linneaus University, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Department of Cultural Sciences. Växjö.

<sup>4</sup> *Kulturmiljölagen* (SFS 1988:950); *Tid för Kultur* (prop. 2009/10:3).

I focus specifically on three actors - archaeologists, conservators, and museums - as all of these are actively involved in selection and de-selection processes for museum collections, which are an immediate, physical result of both functional and dysfunctional collaboration processes.

Part of my research investigates the organisational structure of the Swedish heritage sector in order to chart the effects of the contract archaeological production chain on museum collections. A current trend towards the detachment of experts in museums, such as archaeologists and conservators, has resulted in a situation where field archaeology and conservation are no longer self-evident parts of basic museum activities<sup>5</sup>. The Swedish Competition Act<sup>6</sup> prohibits contracting authorities, such as county boards (the authorities responsible for archaeological tenders) to seek advice from county museums with contract archaeology departments due to a conflict of interest, and thus many archaeological contractors have become (semi-)independent companies. An estimated 90% of all archaeological excavations in Sweden today, are now carried out as contract archaeology.

Like archaeology, conservation is performed as a competitive business with independent or semi-independent actors competing for tenders. As collections management usually only includes preventive measures at best, most active conservation measures carried out on existing archaeological collections, if any, are subsequently outsourced and undertaken using external funding. The current situation highlights a serious gap of expert knowledge at museums, while the lack of communication between archaeologists, conservators and museum professionals within the heritage sector – perhaps due to minimal contact outside the tender / contractor / sub-contractor situation – results in a selection of artefacts with little or no connection to accession needs, research priorities or identified societal needs. Instead, tight budgets, as well as personal interests, are allowed to steer the choices, creating archaeological collections that are highly affected by our time and methods, but with dubious value for the community or scientific world.

Obviously, there is a dire need for change in order to encourage production of relevant knowledge. With the contract archaeological assemblage of physical collections as a starting point, and from the assumption that successful results can be achieved through collaboration and communication between actors, I address the question on *how* this can be achieved in the final two years of this project.

If you have any comments, thoughts, experiences that you wish to share, I would be delighted to hear from you. You may contact me at [vivian.smits@lnu.se](mailto:vivian.smits@lnu.se). Alternatively, let's get a conversation started on our Facebook page.

### News from our members

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**André Bergeron** (Atelier Archéologie et ethnologie, Centre de conservation du Québec) is working on the third edition of his book on archaeological conservation. It is currently under revision and electronic editing and should be available by the end of this year. André is also finalizing a book about the 25 years of conservation work on the remains of the *Elizabeth and Mary*, a 45-ton bark

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<sup>5</sup> Högberg, A., Fahlander F. (2017). Keynote: The Changing Roles of Archaeology. In *Current Swedish Archaeology*, Vol. 25. [http://www.arkeologiskasamfundet.se/csa/Dokument/Volumes/csa\\_vol\\_25\\_2017/csa\\_vol\\_25\\_2017\\_s13-85\\_keynote.pdf](http://www.arkeologiskasamfundet.se/csa/Dokument/Volumes/csa_vol_25_2017/csa_vol_25_2017_s13-85_keynote.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> *Konkurrenslagen* (2008:579)

that was part of Sir William Phips' failed expedition to Quebec City in 1690. The vessel was returning home to Massachusetts in the late autumn of that year when it was lost at Baie-Trinité, Quebec.

Here is a link to the project website: <https://www.ccq.gouv.qc.ca/phips/wreck01.htm>

Also, an initial report on the wreck (in French): <https://www.ccq.gouv.qc.ca/phips/pdf/57M-1997-report-with-cover-2.pdf>.

## Upcoming Events

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A number of upcoming conferences and meetings are postponed due to the Corona-related situation. The following events are so far unchanged. You are strongly advised to check the relevant websites for updated information.

The next meeting of the **European Association of Archaeologists (EAA)** is taking place from 26-30 August 2020 in Budapest, Hungary. A number of our members will be attending or holding sessions.

<https://www.e-a-a.org/ea2020>

The **IIC 28th Biennial Congress** is scheduled for 2-6 November 2020 in Edinburgh, Scotland.

<https://www.iiconservation.org/congress/Edinburgh>

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