



The Watlington Hoard

Heritage Lottery Fund Activity Plan evaluation



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ASHMOLEAN
MUSEUM OF ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD



UNIVERSITY OF
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OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL

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Report overview

This report summarises key findings from evaluation of the activity plan that accompanied The Ashmolean Museum's acquisition of The Watlington Hoard in 2017.

The activity programme was made possible through a generous grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, and was delivered as a collaborative partnership between The Ashmolean Museum and The Oxfordshire Museums.

While the breadth and depth of engagement activities are introduced in this summary report, additional details and specific recommendations can be found in four separate case studies.

Project evaluation methodology

Over the evaluative period, researchers from the University of Oxford collected data from museum staff and attendees. Interviews with project coordinators were used to explore the inputs and strategies developed to deliver the activities associated with the acquisition. Interviews with participants also provided contextual information that has been used alongside data collected via sessional observations.

Using mixed method approaches data assessing the 'impact' of each of the activities were collected from a representative sample of attendees.

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SEPARATE CASE STUDIES

- THE OXFORDSHIRE MUSEUM - Families and school programming
- THE ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM - School programming
- THE ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM - The Festival of Archaeology 'Big Weekend'
- COLLABORATIVE OUTREACH ACTIVITY - The Watlington Primary Project and Roadshow events



IW PHOTOGRAPHIC: Viewing the Watlington Hoard display at The Oxfordshire Museum

THE ACQUISITION

In October 2015, James Mather, a metal detectorist, unearthed the first large Viking Hoard to have ever been discovered in Oxfordshire. The Hoard, declared Treasure by the coroner of Oxfordshire in 2016, was valued at £1.35 million and required a substantial fundraising effort to enable the acquisition. Thanks to pivotal grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund, The Art Fund, the Ashmolean Friends and Patrons, and several individuals the Ashmolean was able to save the hoard for the nation in 2016.

Comprising about 200 coins (some fragmentary), 7 items of jewellery and 15 ingots (bars of silver), the find is not particularly large, but it is hugely significant because it contains so many coins of Alfred the Great, King of Wessex (r. 871–899) and his less well known contemporary, Ceolwulf II of Mercia (r. 874–c. 879).

The hoard contains 13 examples of the rare 'Two Emperors' penny that shows Alfred and Ceolwulf seated side by side below a winged figure of Victory or an angel. The image on the coins suggests an alliance between the kingdoms of Wessex and Mercia. This challenges the accounts found in written sources which dismiss Ceolwulf as a puppet of the Vikings. Ceolwulf II, the last king of Mercia, quietly disappeared from the historical record in uncertain circumstances and Alfred and his successors then forged a new kingdom of England by taking control of Mercia, before conquering the regions controlled by the Vikings.

The hoard can be dated by the presence of a single 'Two-Line' type penny which was not produced until the late 870s, after the Battle of Edington (May 878) between Alfred's forces and a Viking army. Viking forces moved both by water and land, and they likely used the ancient trackway known as Icknield Street which passes through Watlington, close to where the hoard was found. It is possible that the hoard was buried in the wake of this violence or during the ensuing movement of peoples.

The Hoard has become an integral part of the Ashmolean Museum's world-class collection of art and archaeology. Now residing in the care of experts, fragile items from the Hoard have been safeguarded for conservation and their long-term survival.

With the county's heritage at the forefront of project aims, coordinators sought to give communities 'a sense of pride, ownership and understanding of the Watlington Hoard' through an extensive engagement programme of activities and outreach.

THE PROJECTS

THE OXFORDSHIRE MUSEUM

The Anglo-Saxons in Oxfordshire: Gewisse to Alfred and Beyond..

...The Watlington Hoard was loaned to The Oxfordshire Museum, for five weeks. Having the acquisition piece on loan supported the opening of the museum's new Anglo-Saxon Gallery. During this time, The Oxfordshire Museum hosted a number of events for child and adult attendees, which included a half day event of activities, treasure trail and craft activities during the half-term, and a ticketed lecture series which explored the politics of the period and the 'inside story' of the Watlington Hoard. The presence of the Hoard, and the new gallery motivated members of the public to re-visit the Museum.

THE ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM

Primary groups ...

...at the Ashmolean Museum were offered the choice of two free Key Stage 2 workshops. During the observed 'Treasure Hunters' session, children enjoyed a fast-paced interactive journey of discovery, involving: the concept of a hoard, the significance of coinage, the ownership of discoveries and the legal requirement to declare treasure. The learning journey was supported with roleplay, replica handling and craft activity.

Secondary groups...

... explored the Coin Gallery and became familiarised with the range of Hoards displayed at the Ashmolean Museum. Using an iPad application, students documented their explorations of the Coin

Gallery; they also had the opportunity to handle replica items from the Watlington Hoards and viewed other Anglo Saxon items – which provided context to the humanity and legacy of the period.

Festival of Archaeology 'Big Weekend'...

... Held on the 16th and 17th of July 2017, the Museum piloted it's first 'Big Weekend' event to tie in with the annual nationwide Festival of Archaeology. Over the weekend, audiences were able to interact with living history reenactors, learn of myths and legends, watch live demonstrations and handle items from the Museum's collections. The Hoard was centre stage at the 'Big Weekend', as Viking and Anglo Saxon history emanated throughout the Museum.

Coin handling...

...Volunteers were recruited and trained by the Joint Museums Volunteer Service and curators from the Ashmolean Heberden Coin Room. These volunteers joined the Hands-on Coins team, which runs drop-in coin handling sessions with the public every Saturday. From late-July through September 2017, they were given a set of representative Watlington coins to include alongside their normal coin sets.

Summer outreach...

...Over the summer of 2017, twelve outreach sessions were offered throughout Oxfordshire. Outreach sessions were delivered alongside two community partners, The Oxfordshire Play Association and Oxfordshire Libraries. Replica items were used during object handling sessions, which complimented partner goals to encourage children to participate in new experiences.

THE PROJECTS

COLLABORATIVE OUTREACH

The Watlington Primary School Project...

... Children attending primary school in the vicinity of the Hoard's excavation site took part in an in-depth programme of activities. Students developed knowledge and understanding regarding metal detecting and archaeology; the movements and traditions of the Vikings and Anglo Saxons; and about the contents of the Hoard. In subsequent weeks, students worked with a local artist, to create two installation pieces that were to be displayed at their school.

Roadshow events...

... Over the spring/summer of 2017, The Ashmolean Museum and the Oxfordshire Museum worked together to offer three Roadshow events to local communities, throughout Oxfordshire. The events took place in Bicester, Farringdon and Watlington and were all held at local libraries, in market towns selected to ensure maximum County coverage. Museum curators transported selected items from The Hoard to the events and were on hand to answer questions. Also on offer were lectures, object handling and crafts activities suitable for families led by learning staff.

ONGOING PROJECTS

A National Tour...

From Autumn 2017 the Watlington Hoard is set to reach a larger national audience. Plans are now in the advanced stages and will involve carefully selected items from the Hoard travelling to the Nottingham University Museum and the Jorvik Viking Centre to support conference presentations and themed exhibitions.

- Viking: Rediscover the Legend, 25th November – 4th February at Nottingham University Museum. An exhibition created in collaboration with the British Museum and Yorkshire Museum Trust, which will bring together new interpretations of how the Vikings transformed and shaped life in Britain.
- Jorvik Viking Centre, York, 6th February – mid-May 2018. While in York, The Watlington Hoard will feature at Europe's largest Viking Festival.



IW PHOTOGRAPHIC: A primary school session at The Ashmolean Museum

HOW DO YOU INTERPRET A VIKING HOARD FOR A VARIETY OF AUDIENCES?

- 1) **A story of discovery:** James Mather, the metal detectorist who discovered the Hoard shared his story with public audiences.
- 2) **Archaeology and metal detecting:** Groups learnt key distinctions between these practices.
- 3) **Guardianship and preservation:** the Hoard facilitated discussions around finding treasure and the rights and responsibilities involved. The Hoard is now in the care of experts who are responsible for the care and conservation of fragile objects.
- 4) **Relics of a tumultuous time:** The Hoard provided a stepping stone into broader discussions concerning Viking and Anglo-Saxon movements, settlements and invasions of the UK.
- 5) **Unearthed mystery:** Groups speculated about the person who buried the treasure, their reasons why, and their rationale for selecting the final location.
- 6) **A historical alliance between kingdoms:** Rare coins found within the Hoard highlight an alliance between Wessex and Mercia, two Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, who fought *together* to preserve England from Viking conquest.
- 7) **Materials used for trade:** Groups learned about Viking currency and how it was the weight of precious metals that were used for trade, rather than coinage.

- 8) **Awards of merit:** Silver arm-rings were found within the Hoard, these were awarded to Viking warriors to strengthen bonds with their leader.
- 9) **Designs of the era:** Intricate items contained within the Hoard give insight into the skill and craftsmanship of metal workers of the period. Two sets of replica jewellery were commissioned to complement activities, enabling a 'hands-on' experience.

WHAT APPROACHES WERE PARTICULARLY EFFECTIVE?

'I enjoyed being able to feel replicas of the items. It was also very interesting because Watlington is nearby.' (Secondary school group, Ashmolean Museum)

Handling replicas encouraged groups to ask questions about the Hoard and enabled sensory learning experiences that allowed people to connect with museums collections in a memorable way.

Living history groups were used to support activities, at the Watlington Roadshow and the Big Weekend event. All members of these groups were approachable and engaging; they took pride in sharing their passion and specialist knowledge with the public, inspiring discussions about crafts, metalwork, class systems, medicine, and diet.



IW PHOTOGRAPHIC: Installation Art at the Big Weekend, created by families working with artist Francesca Shakespeare

KEY OUTCOMES

ENGAGEMENT WITH THE HOARD

Numbers engaging with Hoard based activities (Fig. to date [Dec, 2017]).



Numbers engaging

Roadshows	Outreach/ adult education	Big Weekend	Loan to Oxfordshire Museum	KS1 & 2 Ashmolean	Secondary/ FE Ashmolean	TOTAL
1012	70	6708	9220	180	135	17,325

Reaching broad audiences

Thanks to the efforts of staff and volunteers from the Ashmolean Museum, The Oxfordshire Museum and funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, **there have been over seventeen thousand engagements to date**, with people participating in a wide variety of free engagement activities.

The importance of outreach

Demographic data collected across the three Roadshow events highlighted the strength of outreach in engaging targeted communities. Of fifty seven people surveyed at the Roadshow events:

- Nearly one-third of attendees had not visited either one of the local museums within the last year.
- Twenty percent of attendees had never visited the Ashmolean Museum, and 73% had never visited The Oxfordshire Museum.
- 17% of attendees had not visited either the Ashmolean Museum or The Oxfordshire Museum before.

KEY OUTCOMES

ENCOURAGING MEANINGFUL LEARNING

Meaningful learning involves understanding how the pieces of an entire concept fit together. This type of learning often builds upon an individual's existing knowledge and extends it in memorable ways.

The project supported meaningful learning in four key areas:

1. The life and time of the Anglos-Saxons and Vikings
2. Metal detecting and archaeology
3. Connections to local history
4. The work of museums

1)The life and time of the Anglos-Saxons and Vikings

- All activities incorporated key information about this period, which is a key component of the national curriculum.
- Museum Educators built upon pupils' existing knowledge through their introduction of chronological narratives and an explanation of how this period influenced England. For example, The Oxfordshire Museum developed a drama based activity, which highlighted the movements of clans around Europe, the expansion and dissolution of kingdoms and various battles within our own country.
- Class teachers praised museum staff for 'building knowledge and wonder', their ability to widen knowledge beyond the curriculum and their ability to focus on material history.

- Themed activities, hosted at The Ashmolean during the Big Weekend were very popular and were applauded for bringing history to life.

'Excellent talks. Would love to attend another Anglo-Saxon/Viking weekend at the Ashmolean in the future. Great format and idea!' (Adult comment card feedback, Big Weekend event)

'I enjoyed holding the objects and listening to the experts explain how they were made. They made history come alive. I would love to come again' (Adult comment card feedback, Big Weekend event).

'An excellent range of activities for the children. They enjoyed all of them. Great way of getting them learning. All volunteers were helpful and great with the kids.' (Parent feedback, Big Weekend event)

'Attended both lectures on Saturday as well. This has been an excellently planned weekend with a high standard of well-received lectures. I appreciated a chance to handle replica of the Hoard. Congratulations on a first-class achievement.' (Adult comment card feedback, Big Weekend event).



IW PHOTOGRAPHIC: Bass relief coin making at The Big Weekend in The Education Centre, The Ashmolean Museum.

KEY OUTCOMES

2) Metal detecting and archaeology

All lectures and activities revolved around the story of James Mather, the metal detectorist who unearthed the Hoard.

- For younger children, his discovery opened up discussions about treasure, and for older groups the process of documentation and registry were introduced.
- Children sought for, and 'excavated' buried artefacts, using the practices associated with of metal detecting and archaeology, by completing this physical activity, key differences were made apparent to the children at Watlington Primary School.
- For older children and adult audiences, discussions involved the legalities and conservation associated with unearthed treasure.

'I now know the difference between archaeologists and metal detectorists' (Year 6 student, Watlington Primary School).

3) Connections to local history

Prior to the in-depth primary project, many Watlington schoolchildren did not know what 'a hoard' was, or that one had been found in their local area. Since the project 78% of the children now report feeling more connected to their local history:

- *'because it has shown that Watlington has some famous artefacts'* (Year 6 student, Watlington Primary)

- *'it is amazing to know that there was a hoard buried really close to us. I now know more about the area'* (Year 6 student, Watlington Primary).

The Watlington history society is planning to organise an annual celebration of local history focused around the Hoard.

4) The work of museums

Across the various activities and projects, attendees saw museum staff working in varied contexts. Staff explained methods of historical enquiry and how evidence is used to support and make new historical claims.

- Class teachers commented that *'The children have learnt to really appreciate artefacts in museums and the value they hold historically'*.
- Students also recognised the work of the museums and the role in their education. *'I think it is important because we wouldn't be able to learn about them without them.'* (Student, secondary school group)
- 66% of visitors reported that the Big Weekend had given them a better understanding of archaeology and the work of museums.
- At the Roadshow events, 77% of attendees suggested that the event had given them a better understanding of the archaeology and the work of museums.
- Observations indicated that The Roadshow events enabled the public to understand the work of museums, because of their focus on the Hoard, rather than on a broader Anglo-Saxon and Viking period.

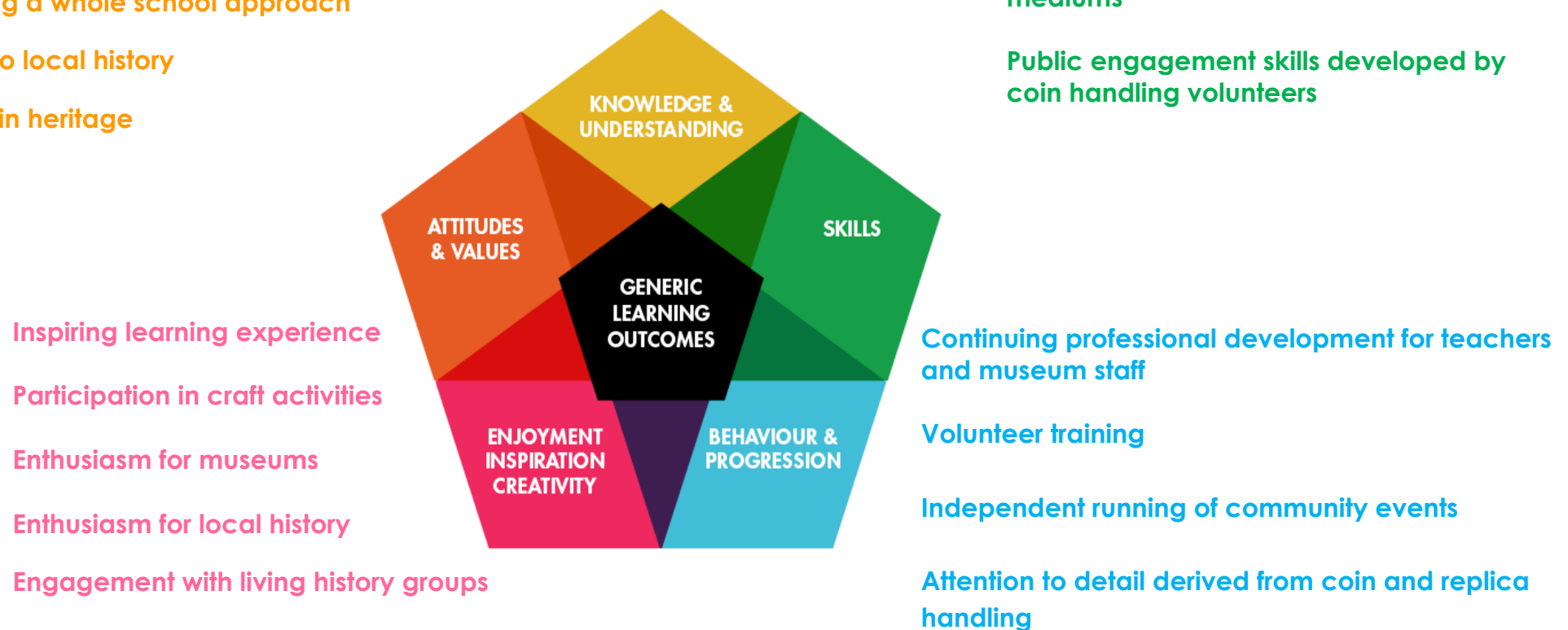
KEY OUTCOMES

IN TERMS OF GENERIC LEARNING OUTCOMES

An appreciation of the work of museums
Understanding a whole school approach
Connection to local history
Taking pride in heritage

Cross curricular learning
Learning from objects
Viking and Anglo Saxon period
Metal detecting and archaeology

Improved speaking and listening skills
Confidence to ask questions
Identifying clues from artefacts
Experience working with different art mediums
Public engagement skills developed by coin handling volunteers



KEY OUTCOMES

WHAT ROLE THE SCHOOLS OUTREACH PROGRAMMES HAVE PLAYED IN ATTRACTING VISITORS TO THE FESTIVAL OF ARCHEOLOGY BIG WEEKEND

- The project has highlighted the importance of outreach work in engaging communities and the success of partner in-depth school projects and Roadshow events.
- For maximum impact outreach and in-reach events should be within proximity to one another.

During the initial planning stages, it was the intention that the Big Weekend would be a grand finale to the community outreach projects, and an incentive to draw the community crowds into the Museum. In practice, timescales slipped and this was not possible, as many of the outreach projects took place after the Big Weekend.

Hosting the Watlington Roadshow the weekend after the Watlington Primary project proved to be incredibly successful. The Primary project gave school children an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the Hoard, its place in history and its significance within their local community. These children were then enthusiastic to share what they had learnt with members of their community at the Roadshow event. They also helped to generate huge interest amongst parents, carers and the wider community.



IW PHOTOGRAPHIC: Bass relief coin making at The Big Weekend in The Education Centre, The Ashmolean Museum.



IW PHOTOGRAPHIC: The Wulfheadnas living-history group discussing their wares at The Big Weekend event

LESSONS LEARNED

1. The development of a Roadshow model

- In total, 1012 people attended the Roadshows, highlighting the dramatic success of this style of community engagement.
- Staffs were in agreement that this style of event provided a way to reach target audiences.
- All staff spoke highly of the provision that was offered, but also noted the logistical challenges they presented.

Each Roadshow event followed a similar format, whereby lectures were offered to adult audiences, items from the Hoard were accompanied by experts, and craft activities were provided for children and families. Members of the public were enthralled by the displays and appreciated these events within their local communities.

Michael Lewis, the Head of Portable Antiquities at the British Museum was invited to attend one of the Roadshow events; he was reportedly 'bowled over' by the provision available and was said to have left the day feeling enthusiastic about the British Museum trialling a similar model.

'You can read about things but there is nothing like experiencing an element of it to fire up the imagination and to see the possibilities' Carol Anderson (Museum Service Manager of The Oxfordshire Museum).

Curators and staff recognised the potential of the Roadshow model and were in strong support of this style of event. However, capacity issues were raised.



LESSONS LEARNED

2. Sharing best practice

- Museum staff used the opportunity to observe sessions at partner museums which they valued as Continuing Professional Development.
- This practice aided in museum staff 'getting to know each other', in a way that can now be built upon.

Staff commented that these relationships will now make it easy *'to pick up the phone or drop an email to somebody and say "what do you think about this, or are you up for that" (Carol Anderson, The Oxfordshire Museum)*.

Staff at The Oxfordshire Museum felt that it had been beneficial for their smaller museum to be seen working with the Ashmolean Museum, thanks to the reach of the much larger organisation. For example, The Ashmolean Museum will be better placed to promote The Oxfordshire Museum's school loan boxes in the future.

3. Collaboration

Sharing the Hoard between two Museums brought with it a number of inevitable challenges, which involved:

- The geographical separation of the two Museums; travel alone consumed hours of staff time, even before meetings were accounted for;
- The Museums are two separate organisations with their own established working practices;
- Within the Ashmolean Museum, staff had to liaise with a number of different departments, this further delayed communication between the museums, and response time between teams.

However, this logistical challenge also highlighted one of the projects main strengths.

- All staff involved in the project commented on the relationships that had developed between the Ashmolean Museum's Education Team, and the Learning and Access Team, of The Oxfordshire Museum.
- Comments involved the flexibility and generosity of staff, but also an understanding of the constraints and competing demands faced by each of the museums.
- Staff from each Museum had been impressed with the sheer scale and organisation of the projects that they had been able to deliver. This was attributed to the enthusiasm of the staff teams involved. Frequently team members went above and beyond in support of the project.

Staff from both Museums expressed an interest in working with each other in the future, although this was underlined with the caveat of staff capacity.

LESSONS LEARNED

4. Establishing a project lead

- The nature of the Hoard meant the acquisition crossed a number of curatorial departments, all acting as stakeholders in the development and the delivery of the project. Other key departmental stakeholders included learning, public engagement, conservation and registrar teams.
- It is essential to have a project lead in place to coordinate across teams with a complex project like this. The appointment of a Project Manager was delayed and in the interim this gap was filled by core staff with competing demands on their time: Helen Ward (Deputy Head of Education at the Ashmolean Museum) and Dr Sarah Doherty (Public Engagement Assistant at the Ashmolean Museum). It takes time to recruit an external project manager and this should be factored into initial planning.
- This experience can be contrasted against that of The Oxfordshire Museum. Sue Wright, the lead of the in-depth primary project, worked on a freelance basis and the project was postponed to the Autumn term to factor in getting her in place. When asked to reflect on her role, Sue commented on her 'unique position' which she believed suitably 'contained' her workload and gave her 'time to think'. Furthermore, Sue felt that her freelance position gave her capacity to direct additional efforts wherever necessary.

5. Appropriate timing

- Staff commented on the flurry of excitement that comes with new acquisition projects, which often involve flexibility and agility.
- The timing of delivery impacted two key components of the dissemination of this acquisition, involving school groups and the Big Weekend event. In an ideal situation, schools need an advanced warning to maximize the benefit of their engagement with museums. However, it is recognized that this is not always possible.



IW PHOTOGRAPHIC: Object handling with the Wulfheadonas living history re-enactors at The Big Weekend event

CONCLUSION

To date, staff teams at the Ashmolean Museum and The Oxfordshire Museum have spoken highly of the working relationships that have developed and the scale of the offer that has been made available to local communities. Funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund has allowed both Museums to trial projects which have not been attempted before, bridging museums, and developing an incredibly successful and well-received working Roadshow model, which can be re-used with future acquisition pieces.

To date, over 19 000 people have been able to engage with pieces from the collection and associated educational activities. This figure will only increase as pieces from the Hoard as they tour to Nottingham and York.

Audiences have been enthralled and engaged by the significance of the local find and more broadly, associated discussion of metal detecting, archaeology and history making.

For a detailed description of each of the projects, please consult the three separate Case Studies, which offer a true picture of the depth of engagement through qualitative reflections. Furthermore, specific project recommendations have been made, which may be most relevant for each one of the Museums and their education teams.



IW PHOTOGRAPHIC: A grave burial session for Primary school children at the Ashmolean Museum