

Institution: University of Bristol
Unit of Assessment: 30 History
Title of case study: Changing the display and interpretation of the Lindow Man exhibit and encouraging religious tolerance
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The preserved remains of an ancient human body, familiarly dubbed 'Lindow Man', are among the British Museum's most celebrated exhibits. For over 20 years, Lindow Man was presented as a victim of a highly ritualised killing and as compelling evidence that human sacrifice was practised in ancient Britain. This conditioned not merely popular views of the British past but also attitudes to religious pluralism in the present. Professor Ronald Hutton's research resulted in a fundamental alteration of the display, to one encouraging a multiplicity of interpretations and so more tolerant attitudes. The exhibit was radically changed when it was loaned to the Museum of Manchester in 2008, and a new format embodying this pluralist approach was adopted when it returned to the British Museum in 2011. The much-different exhibit was seen by more than 100,000 visitors to the Museum of Manchester and is now experienced by millions of visitors to the British Museum each year.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The research underpinning this case study consists of Ronald Hutton's investigation into the image of the Druid as reflected in British culture since 1500. The work was formally funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council between 2003 and 2006. The basic premise of this project was that the vivid and contrasting portraits of Druids provided by ancient Greek and Roman, and medieval Irish, texts provided the modern imagination with ample material from which to construct many different images of ancient British religion. These were in turn generated by, and served, very different religious, political and social agendas which provided fascinating insights into modern British culture.</p> <p>Hutton's project quickly led him to a reconsideration of the cultural baggage which had been loaded onto Lindow Man. His reappraisal began with a re-examination of the hostile view of ancient British religion, which was a major feature of treatments of British history since interest in the subject was kindled under the Tudors. A basic characterization of that religion as one of bigotry, fear, ignorance and bloodshed served several agendas, by enabling ancient belief and ritual to become a parallel for, or exemplar of, aspects of humanity of which writers disapproved. Thus, it could be used by Christians to castigate non-Christian faiths; by Protestants to abuse Catholics; by radical British Protestants to smear High Church Anglicanism; by atheists and rationalists to denounce religious belief in general; by imperialists and white supremacists to despise traditional peoples; and by proponents of modernity to condemn the past. It was thus a powerful tradition in British, and indeed European, culture.</p> <p>The project's work suggested that this tradition had been applied in the 20th century to the ancient bodies recovered from bogs in northern Europe, which the Danish scholar P. V. Glob had interpreted wholesale as victims of human sacrifice. When the first British bog body was discovered in conditions which permitted study, at Lindow Moss in Cheshire in 1984, it was interpreted very much according to Glob's model. The British Museum team which investigated it – making it the most heavily studied human body in history up to that point – produced apparently overwhelming evidence that the man had been submitted to an elaborately ritualised triple killing during the Iron Age (the period of the Druids). This was how the body was interpreted when displayed, creating a public sensation and becoming an academic orthodoxy. The research for Hutton's project, published between 2004 and 2009, as listed below [1-4], revealed that this verdict was unsound, both in terms of the original forensic examination of the body and the dating of it. The evidence for the former did not conclusively support a ritual killing, and the corpse seemed to date to the Roman period, when human sacrifice was illegal. The research for Professor Hutton's project therefore suggested that a public reassessment of the significance of this iconic object was timely.</p>

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- [1] R. Hutton, 'What did happen to Lindow Man?', *Times Literary Supplement* (30 January 2004) pp. 12-13. Can be supplied upon request.
- [2] R. Hutton, *The Druids* (Hambledon Continuum, 2007). Can be supplied upon request.
- [3] R. Hutton, *Blood and Mistletoe: The History of the Druids in Britain* (Yale University Press, 2009). Listed in REF2.
- [4] R. Hutton, 'Why Does Lindow Man Matter?', *Time and Mind* 4.2 (2011), pp. 135-48. Can be supplied upon request.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Background

Between the publication of the British Museum's report on Lindow Man in 1986 and the commencement of Hutton's research project in 2003, Lindow Man was used repeatedly as almost certain evidence for human sacrifice in Iron Age Britain. Lindow Man featured as such in the work of leading experts in British history such as Sir Barry Cunliffe, Miranda Aldhouse-Green, Timothy Taylor, Mike Parker Pearson and Ralph Merrifield, and in a popular book by the pioneer of research into Iron Age religion, Anne Ross, and Don Robins. Hutton had himself repeated this reading of the body as orthodoxy in a textbook published in 1991. Furthermore, it was employed as an argument against the toleration of modern spiritual traditions which claimed the name of Druid, by both fundamentalist Christian enterprises such as the Mayflower press and secular-minded journalists such as Jonathan Jones [a]. As such, it functioned in part as a rallying point for religious intolerance: its symbolic significance in national life went far beyond the scholarly.

Professor Hutton was conscious by the late 1990s that rumours existed with regard to the unreliability of the traditional interpretation. When he reviewed the evidence in detail as part of his project, he found these rumours to be well-founded. He accordingly issued a formal challenge to the official story in the *Times Literary Supplement* (TLS) in 2004 [1], which led to a public exchange of views with the British Museum curator responsible for the body, J. D. Hill, who initially defended the existing display. Hutton urged that the body could, in fact, be viewed plausibly as a victim of sacrificial killing, but also as an executed criminal or a murder victim, and that the last two explanations were, given the dating, a little more likely. He therefore advocated an open-minded official interpretation of the exhibit. The labelling of the body was not altered as a result, even when the gallery which included it was refurbished in 2007 and even though Hutton developed his case in a book published that year [2].

Changing the display of the Lindow Man exhibition: the Manchester Museum temporary exhibition

In 2008, Lindow Man was loaned to the Manchester Museum, which exhibited it in a manner that invited a pluralist interpretation of its significance (as Hutton had suggested), described by the Head of Human Cultures at the Manchester Museum in an article as follows:

Acknowledging alternative interpretations of Lindow Man's death, and changing attitudes towards human remains in society, the Museum adopted a polyvocal approach to the exhibition. Eight specially-selected contributors shared their personal thoughts and theories about the dead man. These included a forensic scientist, peat diggers involved in the discovery, a landscape archaeologist, a member of the local community, a Pagan and museum curators from both the British Museum and the Manchester Museum. Personal items belonging to each of the contributors appeared alongside more conventional museum exhibits in order to explore the different meanings that Lindow Man has for different people. [b]

The article indicates Hutton's role in this pluralist interpretation, noting his questioning of the orthodox position and his part in proposing a new interpretation, whilst specifically referring to the

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TL5 article [2]. The museum also held a conference to mark the event, at which Hutton was invited to deliver the keynote address. The British Museum was represented at that by Hill's successor as curator of the gallery which normally held the display, Jody Joy. The Lindow Man Temporary Exhibition was significant for the Museum of Manchester in a number of ways. The exhibition was visited by 133,413 people [c]. A survey by Morris Hargreaves McIntyre indicates that in the July to September 2008 period, total visits to the Manchester Museum increased by 23% compared to the same period the previous year, and that half of those visitors came to see Lindow Man. The survey also notes a significantly higher proportion of visitors coming from outside Manchester [c]. A case study for the University Museums Group, produced by the Manchester Museum, offered further measures of the exhibition's success:

Visitor figures were high. There were over 26,000 hits on the Lindow Man website. The project won two awards:- the Design Week 2009 Award for Best Temporary Exhibition and the British Archaeological Award for Best Innovation for its engagement of the general public about the issue of human remains. Over 12,500 visitor comments cards were filled-in. [d]

The effect on the Manchester Museum went beyond attracting new visitors to the museum and changed the way in which they curated exhibitions and used media to engage new audiences:

This was the first time a high-profile project had been delivered by a team of curators and staff from different sections of the Museum, each contributing their own experience and expertise. A project team gave strategic direction whilst a content team developed the interpretative approach and the exhibits. This new way of working, different in style from traditional curator-led exhibitions, helped to develop team-working skills in the Museum. ... The project developed a model of exhibition making that integrated displays with education, marketing and public programmes. Rather than simply using the exhibition as a vehicle for communicating knowledge, the Museum was able to explore with audiences different aspects of Lindow Man through a range of media as appropriate. The use of up-to-date media such as Blogs, YouTube and Flickr helped to promote discussion and disseminate coverage about the exhibition in a stimulating way that engaged a new computer-literate audience. This has now become embedded in the Museum's practice. [d]

The Manchester exhibition went on to be displayed at the Great Northern Museum, Newcastle, in 2009. In an interview in September 2009, the Museum Manager of the Great Northern Museum described the continuation of the pluralist interpretation:

... this exhibition is all about as presenting the visitors with the evidence that we've got and asking them to make up their own minds about how he died. We've even got some cutting edge technology which was developed by Newcastle University's Culture lab department and which is a multi use of touch table and you can investigate in details some of the forensic data that was collected at the time: x-rays, CT scans. You can even run simulations to see particular weapons in action so can decide for yourself what might have killed him. And really, because we don't know, we're throwing it open to our visitors to say here's the data, you decide. You make your interpretation, which is just as valid as those of the archaeologist and the forensic scientists. [e]

Return to the British Museum: encouraging tolerance

In 2009, when a larger book by Hutton developed the argument for pluralism yet further [3], Dr Joy authored a pamphlet, published by the British Museum, which wholly accepted it and offered the public different choices. Joy specifically describes how "The interpretation that Lindow Man was killed as a sacrifice to the gods was questioned by the historian Ronald Hutton in 2004. Hutton demonstrated that alternative theories to sacrifice cannot be excluded using the evidence currently available". [f] Joy explicitly states that the evidence is not conclusive and that, as a result, various interpretations are possible:

From the physical evidence it is possible to establish the sequence of events that led to Lindow Man's death [...]. However, this evidence does not on its own explain why he was killed. Combined with archaeological and textual evidence, it has led to different interpretations explaining why

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Lindow Man died.[...] He may have been a willing or hesitant human sacrifice or offering made to the gods; an executed criminal; the victim of a violent crime; [f]

When the body returned to the British Museum in 2011, a new format was provided for its display. This employed the new approach, as Joy explained:

The display of Lindow Man was changed in 2011 after he returned from exhibition at the Manchester and Great North Museums. Some of the changes were as a result of a debate in the Times Literary Supplement between the then curator of the Iron Age collections, Dr JD Hill, and Prof Hutton. This took place in 2004 and uncovered some errors in the old display as well as highlighting the possibility of alternative interpretations concerning how Lindow Man died.

The British Museum received over 5.575 million visitors in 2011/2012 and was the most popular cultural attraction in the UK for the sixth year running. One in four overseas visitors to London and one in ten overseas visitors to the UK now visit the British Museum as part of their trip. [g]

Even now, some long-established experts in the Iron Age, such as Professors Cunliffe and Aldhouse-Green, still restate the former official interpretation of Lindow Man, as if no questions had ever been raised about it. Nor have all Internet references to the body been updated. However, the reformed official display, and the booklet associated with it, have together embraced a very different approach. As a result, the body has ceased to feature as a weapon in hostile reactions to religious diversity; the evidence for which is the apparent total lack of references to it in that context since the change. There are wider implications in this story for the way in which ancient evidence is interpreted and presented to the public, suggesting as it does that an acknowledgement of the difficulty of reading archaeological data, and an invitation to viewers to draw different, equally possible conclusions from it, may not merely be more honest in scholarly terms but may also help to build a genuinely multi-cultural, multi-faith, diverse and tolerant society.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- [a] Jonathan Jones, 'Riddle of the Bog' in *The Guardian* (21 June 2007) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2007/jun/21/heritage.jonathanjones>. An example of the orthodox position of using Lindow Man as evidence for human sacrifice.
- [b] Bryan Sitch, 'Courting controversy – the Lindow Man exhibition at the Manchester Museum' *University Museums and Collections Journal*, 2, 2009. Corroborates the polyvocal nature of the Lindow Man exhibition at the Manchester Museum.
- [c] 'Lindow Manchester Blog: Visitor Figures' (2009). Available at: <http://lindowmanchester.wordpress.com/category/visitor-figures/>. Corroborates visitor figures for the Lindow Man exhibition at the Manchester Museum.
- [d] Bryan Sitch, 'Lindow Man temporary exhibition at the Manchester Museum' University Museums Group Members Projects case study (17th August 2010).
- [e] Interview with Sarah Glynn, Museum Manager, the Great Northern Museum (27 September 2009). Available at: <http://www.thenakedscientists.com/HTML/content/interviews/interview/1207/>. Corroborates the pluralist interpretation of Lindow Man's death when the exhibition was loaned to the Great Northern Museum.
- [f] J. Joy, *Lindow Man* (British Museum, 2009). Corroborates British Museum's acceptance that a multiplicity of interpretations of Lindow Man's death are possible.
- [g] Press Release, The British Museum, 'A year of success for the British Museum – 260 years in the making' (2013). Available at: https://www.britishmuseum.org/about_us/news_and_press/press_releases/2013/a_year_of_success.aspx. Corroborates British Museum visitor numbers.
- [h] Curator of European Iron Age Collections, British Museum. Corroborates change to the format of the Lindow Man exhibit at the British Museum and distinct contribution of Hutton's research to that change.