ETHNIC AND RACIAL STUDIES

Ancient objects with modern meanings: museums, volunteers, and the Anglo-Saxon 'Staffordshire Hoard' as a marker of 21st-century regional identity

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Public interest in the Hoard created long queues outside the Potteries Museum when it was first displayed. ©
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Could an aged silver pommel (StH 711), probably made on the Continent, represent elite identity claims among the Angles or Saxons? Length: 48.1mm. © Birmingham Museums Trust.
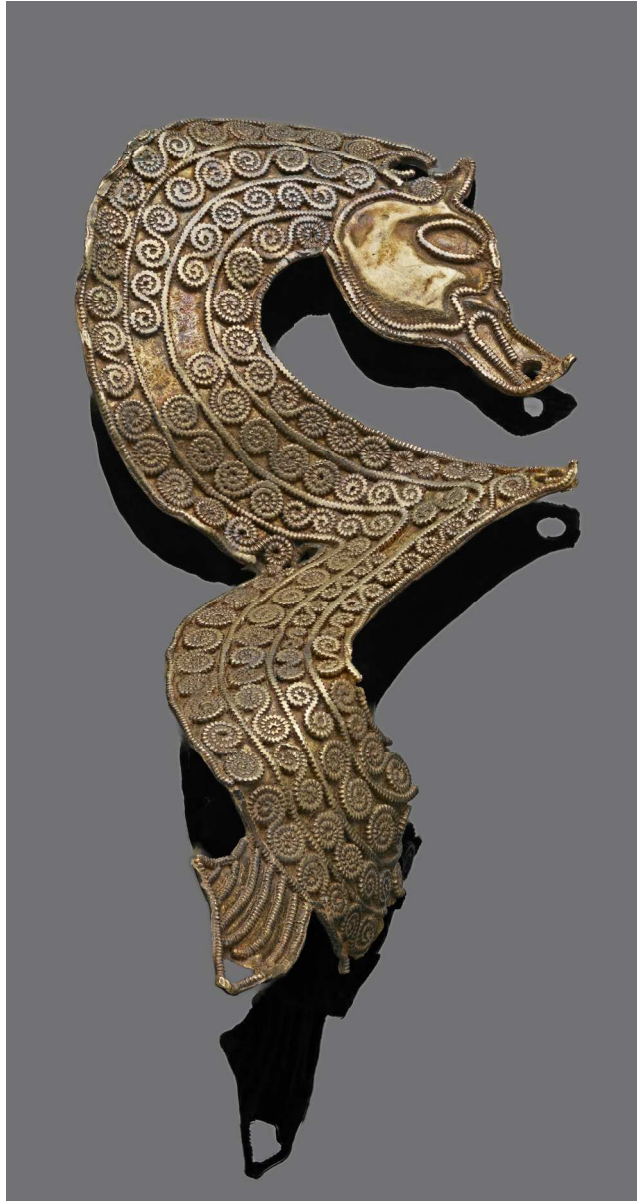77x51mm (300 x 300 DPI)

A group of soil-encrusted objects from the Hoard. © Birmingham Museums Trust
99x75mm (300 x 300 DPI)

Gold mount (StH 1497) popularly known as the 'seahorse'. Length: 41.1mm. © Birmingham Museums Trust
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Ancient objects with modern meanings:

museums, volunteers, and the Anglo-Saxon 'Staffordshire Hoard'

as a marker of 21st-century regional identity

Abstract: The Staffordshire Hoard is the largest Anglo-Saxon gold hoard ever found. On display from soon after its discovery in 2009 during fundraising to secure it for the region, the Hoard has become a source of local pride in Staffordshire, receiving over a million visitors. This article explores the Hoard as a marker of identity, both in the past and in the present and evaluates how the 'treasure process', museums and museum volunteers are shaping public identification with the Anglo-Saxon past of the Mercian kingdom. Drawing on focus group data, we argue that aspects of the naming and display of the Hoard have encouraged its inclusion in existing narratives of belonging and 'authenticity' in Staffordshire. Such archaeological discoveries have the potential to provide points of continuity between the post-industrial present and the distant past, and stimulate a reconsideration of the present status of the region in contemporary cultural and political discourse.

Keywords: Staffordshire Hoard; material culture; Anglo-Saxon Archaeology; regional identity; museum volunteers; heritage.

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In 2009 a large hoard of Anglo-Saxon gold was uncovered in Staffordshire.[1] More than 5kg of gold and 1.5kg of silver metalwork, worked into fittings for weapons, war-gear and religious objects, had been buried in the mid-7th century AD when that part of Britain was ruled by the kings of Anglo-Saxon Mercia. The Hoard is one of the highest profile archaeological finds of its type for a generation in England. It has also highlighted the increasing impact of 'portable antiquities' (a class of artefact discovered outside archaeological excavation and reported through the Portable Antiquities Scheme) on public interest in the distant past.[2] In the first five years after its discovery, the Staffordshire Hoard was seen by over a million people but its meanings for the study of the Anglo-Saxon past are just beginning to be uncovered. This paper considers how the discovery of Anglo-Saxon objects intersects with questions of 21st-century local identity and regional pride in Staffordshire, a Midland county better known for its recent agricultural and industrial heritage. It evaluates the role of the 'treasure process', museums, and museum volunteers in mediating that interaction and shaping new forms of public identification with the past. Interaction with newly rediscovered relics from the past can stimulate discussion of the 'forgetting' of post-industrial regions in modern Britain, a process that is reflected in wider political trends of distrust of the metropolis and in calls for greater regional autonomy. We show how dramatic archaeological discoveries that demand a reconceptualization of past regional identities can prompt public reflection on regional identity in the present.

Archaeology, objects, and identity

The archaeological record has often been shaped by a search for a 'usable past' to recreate, legitimate, or disrupt modern understandings, sensibilities, and allegiances. The impact of archaeological finds on modern, contemporary identities was given new urgency by the resurgence of nationalist agendas in Europe during the 1990s (Díaz-Andreu and Champion 1996). Archaeological collections have also been the source of post-colonial claims by indigenous groups struggling for possession of land and influence over the interpretation of their material heritage (Watkins 2006). Embedded nationalist narratives have at times prioritised particular archaeological agendas, for example in the preference for 'Celtic' over

'Viking' narratives in the archaeology of Ireland (Wallace 2008). Equally, cherished

narratives of national pasts have proved difficult for new archaeological research to dislodge,

as shown by James (1999) of the Atlantic Celts. For the nation as an 'imagined community',

archaeological discoveries often become powerful talismans of national cultural narratives.

Early medieval examples of this phenomenon include the Ardagh chalice in Ireland or Viking

ships from Roskilde in Denmark, their power deriving from public perception that their

'antiquity and uniqueness' embodies the spirit of a nation (Smith 2001, 447).

Museums, as both repositories and displays of archaeological artefacts, are arenas in which

national identities can be constructed and negotiated (McLean 1998). It has been argued that

in museums the past is being continually recreated in the present, and that 'we create the

heritage we require' (Urry, 1996; Ashworth and Graham 2005, 5). The impact of Anglo-

Saxon collections on communities within England has been harder to establish, however,

perhaps because of mainstream uncertainty about the role of 'Englishness' and 'English

heritage' within a contemporary British context. Such uncertainty can be traced back to the

19th century, when prominent Anglo-Saxon artefacts such as the Kingston Down brooch

failed to find homes in so-called 'national' collections' whose keepers argued that such

artefacts were more properly housed in 'provincial' museums (McCombe 2011, 154-7). The

meaning of the Anglo-Saxon past and the contested nature of 'English' cultural identity are

still beset by contested historical and biological claims, made especially by far right groups:

thus, the display of 'Englishness' and the relevance of the English past have become difficult

topics for museums whose collections focus on such material (Smith 2012, 54-5).

Regional identity, by contrast, is acknowledged as a potential tourist commodity,

focusing on 'authentic' aspects of regional heritage, such as an historic Viking presence

(Halewood and Hannam 2001), ancient landscapes, or regional traditions such as food

products (Simon 2005). Collections in regional museums are likewise seen as important for

community identity, which has sometimes encouraged calls for the restitution of important

cultural items, for example, the campaign to rehouse the Lindisfarne Gospels from London's

British Library to North-East England (Davis 1999). Such calls may be prompted by

economic factors but also draw on affective associations of certain items with specific 'place-

identities'. Local feeling over the fate of material heritage may be particularly powerful if

there is a sense that a locality has been overlooked within the nation at the expense of the

'metropolis', as Dicks suggested of industrial heritage in the Rhondda Valley and Jones

found in exchanges between a Highlands community and the National Museum of Scotland

in Edinburgh over the early medieval Pictish Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab (Dicks, 2000;
Jones, 2004).

Reaction to the Staffordshire Hoard's discovery and subsequent display in the
Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, therefore should be understood in the context of male and
female working-class identities in the Midlands. Stoke-on-Trent, the largest city in
Staffordshire, has been physically defined by and is regularly named for its pottery industry
which employed many local men and women (Briggs 1993). Local novelist Arnold Bennett
celebrated this industrial landscape as '… absurdly, ridiculously, splendidly English', in
contrast to more usual depictions of rural Englishness (Johnson 1993). Recently, however,
Stoke-on-Trent and its environs have been characterised by post-industrial decline. In 2010,
Stoke-on-Trent was ranked as the 3rd most deprived local authority in the West Midlands
(out of 30) and the 9th most deprived Unitary/Metropolitan authority area in England (from
92) (City of Stoke-on-Trent 2011). This dialectic between a past characterised by skilled
working-class employment and deprivation in the post-industrial present is evident in how
identities are currently negotiated in the Potteries. Johnson (1993) has suggested that the
heritage of the pottery industry is reflected in local interest in craftwork skills. However,
some have suggested that the shadow of the pottery industry has hampered efforts at
regeneration, a situation exacerbated by the geographical make-up of the city as a
conurbation of small towns (Jayne, 2004).

Within this context, local museums address wider industrialization and de-industrialization in
a reflexive manner for a largely local audience. Waterton has argued that local visitors to the
nearby Gladstone Pottery Museum are actively engaged in using the industrial past for
processes of identity and meaning-making important in the preservation of working-class
heritage (2011, 360). Similarly, the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery showcases a world-
leading ceramics collection, popularised by 'Ozzy', a 17th century Staffordshire slipware owl
rediscovered on Antiques Roadshow. Fyfe and Ross (1996) have argued that "such artefacts
express the mechanical solidarity that one finds in the Potteries where deep historical
associations with a manufacturing trade have tended to counter the centrifugal forces of
modernisation" (p.129). It can be argued, therefore, that local museum collections reflect a
deep and abiding interest and identification among the local population with the skilled
working-class heritage of the area. Figures from a 2012 exit survey of then comparably
funded museums and galleries also suggest that, compared with national audience profiles,

the Potteries Museum caters to strong local working-class audiences of repeat visitors and to diverse educational backgrounds:

<Table 1>

This paper explores how the display of the Staffordshire Hoard in the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery is incorporated within these strong local narratives. Local responses to the Hoard discovery have, perhaps understandably, often focused on its potential to bring tourism and economic regeneration to the region. Stoke's *Sentinel* newspaper on 2 November 2009, shortly after the discovery was made public, asked 'why shouldn't visitors come here, for a change – rather than us having to travel to London?'. In October 2011 a trade delegation from Stoke-on-Trent accompanied the Staffordshire Hoard display to the National Geographic Museum in Washington D.C. However, as demonstrated below, it would be wrong to see local enthusiasm for the Hoard as merely prompted by economics. Rather, there is a strong sense that the Hoard can act as a focus for the restoration of local pride, and a means of challenging Staffordshire's perceived marginalisation. Although the Hoard predates Staffordshire's industrial heritage by a millennium (and may prove not have been made in Mercia at all), it has already been incorporated within local narratives of pride in craft skills and manufacturing.

The Staffordshire Hoard

The Staffordshire Hoard was found by a local metal detectorist in 2009 (Leahy et al. 2011). The discovery was reported to the regional Finds Liaison Officer at the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS). Recognising that the objects were over 300 years old and at least 10% precious metal, they became subject to The Treasure Act 1996 and HM Coroner was informed. In collaboration with PAS experts, the metal detectorist, and the landowner, archaeologists from Staffordshire County Council and Birmingham Archaeology returned to the site in Summer 2009 where further finds were excavated and blocks of earth removed for X-ray and conservation. An inquest established the legal status of the find which, still caked in soil, was declared 'Treasure'. The Hoard was evaluated at over 1300 objects, ranging from a folded gold cross to tiny fragments of silver foil. To protect the anonymity of the site once the find was made public (typical for PAS finds) a pseudonym was given: 'The Staffordshire Hoard'.

Amid international media attention, the formal linking of the treasure with Staffordshire heightened local public interest. The 'Staffordshire Hoard' name, subsequently trademarked by the owners, provided a hook for local media; encouraging popular identification with the find and reflecting hope in the Hoard's potential for local redevelopment. Despite academic unease (Pitts 2010), scholarly efforts to re-label it the 'Staffordshire (Ogley Hay) Hoard' or link it to the nearby village of Hammerwich have had little impact on public perceptions (Klein 2013; Webster et al. 2011).

The Staffordshire Hoard was valued at £3.285m, and the Art Fund led a high profile campaign to 'save' it from being sold on the open market. The British Museum supported a bid by two regional museums – the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent and Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (now Birmingham Museums Trust) – to acquire the Hoard in partnership, each pledging £100,000. The public queued for up to 4 hours at Birmingham and Stoke to see the finds.

<Figure 1>

An intense period of fundraising, with substantial support from local media gathered more than £900,000 in public contributions. Finally the National Heritage Memorial Fund gave £1,250,000 to secure the Staffordshire Hoard 'for the nation'. Building on a successful partnership between the owners and Staffordshire sites of Anglo-Saxon significance, 'The Mercian Trail' partnership was formed to develop a touring exhibition. Further displays of the Hoard at Lichfield (site of the Anglo-Saxon bishop of Mercia), Tamworth (the Mercian royal centre), and Stafford (the eponymous Anglo-Saxon walled town) aimed to sustain momentum in fundraising for further research and to present the Hoard in its historic context: the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Mercia. By November 2012, when the field was ploughed again and 81 more objects were identified, the profile of the Staffordshire Hoard was such that a single sponsor, royal jewellers Wartski of London, quickly offered £57,395 needed to buy them for the museums.

The acquisition of the Staffordshire Hoard marked the beginning of the research process, with c.4,000 objects collected for analysis (Fern 2014). It is both a unique individual find and also a remarkable collection of objects that were damaged in antiquity before being placed in the ground. Each piece represents an investment of scarce precious metals, time, and craft skill in an overt display of 7th-century Anglo-Saxon elite identity. Early scholarly theories to explain the Hoard have ranged from a ritual deposit or shrine, to a smith's hoard

or battlefield loot (Webster et al. 2011).[3] The Hoard is very unusual in an Anglo-Saxon context; it is a 'male' assemblage of dismembered war-gear (without sword blades), and lacks coins, jewellery, and female dress accessories (ibid., 221). The weaponry elements including c.85 sword hilt pommels and remains of a helmet; these were potent symbols of masculine authority in the warrior culture that created the early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms (Fern 2014; Härke 1990). Some larger objects are overtly Christian: a processional cross, a pectoral cross, and an inscribed gold strip with martial passages reworked from the Old Testament; 'Rise up, Lord, and may your enemies be dispersed and those who hate you flee from your face'.

Fischer, Soulat, and Linton-Fischer (2013) have argued that the Staffordshire Hoard can be read as evidence of a 'kleptocracy', a society dominated by warfare and looting where sword fittings and other symbols of individual elite identity could be redistributed to express new social bonds and political authority, or be removed from circulation to deactivate them and disarm opponents. A small number of pieces were over a century old when buried, including worn silver pommels, such that depicting a male face which may have been made on the Continent [Figure 2]; perhaps some were recognisable as heirlooms identified with particular historic identities, lineages, or legendary origins.

<Figure 2>

How these objects came to be buried together is unknown. Archaeological investigation has been unable yet to reveal a context for the Staffordshire Hoard beyond its location: a prominent ridge, overlooking Roman Watling Street in the heartlands of the Mercian kingdom (Dean et al. 2010). Due to the requirements of the 'treasure' process and fundraising campaign, the Hoard went on public display still caked in soil soon after its discovery, before the research process began. This early sense of mystery, so frustrating to archaeologists, seems to have encouraged interpretation from both museum volunteers and the general public. The present relatively undefined nature of the Staffordshire Hoard offers a blank slate on which different personal, regional, and national identities can be inscribed. This 'provisionality' (Wagner-Pacifici 1996) arguably lends the Hoard some of its psychological appeal: that this new discovery could not immediately be authoritatively categorised by historians and archaeologists has allowed museum visitors and wider publics to 'work through' its significance. This process of 'working through', as carried out and facilitated by museum volunteers, is the focus of our analysis.

Methodology and Context

This study is part of a wider exploration of the regional impact of the Staffordshire Hoard discovery, reflecting our interest in understanding multiple readings of the medieval past and the role of volunteers and replicas in engaging wider publics with medieval heritage. In February 2014, we held a focus group with volunteers at the Potteries Museum to investigate how the Staffordshire Hoard is being used to articulate and re-articulate identities in the region. Volunteers have come to play an important role in Hoard interpretation: during the Staffordshire Hoard exhibition curated for the Cultural Olympiad (July 2012–March 2013) visitors to the Potteries Museum were supported by 2179.25 hours from volunteer hosts with support and training from permanent staff.[4] Having been first recruited to support the thousands who queued to see the initial fundraising exhibition, volunteers now act as 'Hoard hosts', to help visitors engage with and understand the Hoard.

Local excitement at the discovery stimulated initial recruitment: among the five volunteers of our focus group, only one had volunteered at the museum previously. Volunteer recruitment did not depend on historical knowledge of the Anglo-Saxon period, and most of the volunteers in the group acknowledged a prior lack of interest. However, they had all been motivated to acquire specialist knowledge to fulfil this role: one volunteer (P2 below) reported, 'I now have a bookshelf full of Anglo-Saxon and Beowulf and all sorts of things'. Group members reported diverse educational and career backgrounds, but all identified strongly with the Potteries, having lived there for formative periods either from birth, or as adults; P2 situated herself within 'Potteries heritage' by invoking her mother and aunts' occupations as skilled workers within the ceramics industry. Focus-group volunteers were strongly motivated to support their community, but referred to other volunteer colleagues motivated by a pre-existing specialist interest, e.g. re-enactors or a desire for skills toward a heritage career. Such diverse motivations reflect recent research on volunteering across disciplines and the importance of acknowledging motivation in volunteer retention (Clary et al. 1998; Orr 2006; Deery et al. 2011).

Six people participated in the focus group: five volunteers and a staff member who works closely with volunteers (P5 in the extracts). Author 2 led the discussion, with Author 1 contributing questions and comments, which was audio-recorded and later transcribed. The volunteers were all white local women of late career or early retirement age who worked in the Staffordshire Hoard Gallery. As such, they were typical of roughly half the volunteers; the remainder comprised largely students and recent graduates, both male and female. The

relative homogeneity among focus group participants was not premeditated, but may reflect volunteer availability on a weekday morning.

Our analysis is part of a wider study and is not intended to offer a definitive account of how the Hoard's discovery has impacted on regional identity in Staffordshire. Rather, the discussion represents, in microcosm, how certain narratives regarding the significance of the Hoard are embedded in the socio-cultural setting within which the Hoard exhibition is situated. Interviewing museum volunteers allows access to these narratives. We also examine how the Hoard itself acts as a marker for the construction of a collective identity among museum volunteers (situated in turn within narratives of regional identity), and the relationship between the museum and its visitors in co-constructing the importance of the Hoard to the region. The dramatic nature of the find, and the way in which it has become associated with the area, make tracing the processes at work here of real importance in building a picture of the role of archaeological finds and museums in the development of regional identity, both in Britain, and further afield.

Local pride and global attention: the Hoard as spotlight

To facilitate discussion, we asked participants to write down three words about what the Staffordshire Hoard meant to them. The volunteers immediately identified the Hoard as a means of addressing the perceived marginalisation of Staffordshire:

> **P1[5]:** The first word that came to me is proud, I feel pride in both the fact that we have some of the Staffordshire Hoard here and also proud when I show it to other people. The second word I wrote down was awe because I am in awe of the workmanship involved and the third thing was, I feel that it connects us, connections to the past.
>
> **P2:** I put down I was amazed at the craftsmanship of it and sort of the work involved in doing it, also the fact that it changed conception of the Dark Ages that everybody thinks that it's just mud huts and no, nobody else and yet they made that, and also the fact that it is a, local and it does bring sort of more life to Mercia whereas, which tends to get forgotten as we tend to get forgotten in the Midlands anyway, 'cos we're neither North nor South or, or anything else.
>
> **P3:** I put down that it was heritage of Staffordshire, I think as (P2) said, we do get a bit forgotten so I was glad that it spotlighted Staffordshire and gave an insight to the workmanship that was then when we didn't think there was much at all and I'm actually passionate about this museum so I was really really pleased that this was good for the museum.

P4:   I've written several words down actually but I think I'll pick out three, just totally amazing the whole hoard thing is amazing to me and it's especially amazing because as a host you can see the amazement, you can share the amazement with visitors and other people I've written unique because although people come in to the Hoard and say, oh yes I've seen things like that in India or wherever they've been I still sort of try to pull them back to the concept of it being made here and it being to do with Staffordshire and inspiring I think is the other word because it's inspired so much thought and talk and research and, as (P2) said, changed our concept of what the past was really like.

P5:   I've put down ancestral because it's probably not my ancestors but it's somebody's ancestors who made that and it gives you a connection with them that you don't always feel, the people of the Dark Ages. Craftsmanship because I want to know how they did it, how they did it without magnifying glasses and what have you. Meaning because I want to know what the symbols and the patterns mean, I want to know what their significance is, I know that the Saxons don't do any decoration by accident and I've also put sort of history and blanks because there are great sort of chunks of our past missing that the Hoard might eventually fill in when we know a little bit more about it.

P6:   The first word I've put down was exciting because I think the whole discovery of it, the fact we've got it here and so on is exciting for us and for the public pride again, local pride, I think it's good for the museum, I think it's good for Stoke-on-Trent to have, and Staffordshire to have something to celebrate because there's not much to celebrate in Stoke-on-Trent with the loss of local industries and so on and it's the pride of local people coming in, saying it's so good that we've got something we can be proud of and the research interest which is how they made things and the fact that working here as a volunteer we get all the latest information on what's been found which is stimulating I think for us when we're doing our job.

Three interlinked themes emerged which set the tone for much of the later discussion: the significance of the Hoard for the local area and region; the objects themselves as a tangible link to a remote and mysterious past; the role of the museum, and more particularly the volunteers, in mediating between the two.

Uncertainty surrounding the 'meaning' of the Hoard has not prevented it from becoming incorporated into heritage narratives of Staffordshire. The volunteers position the Hoard as bringing a greater focus on neglected areas of both history and geography: the so-called 'Dark Ages' and modern-day Staffordshire. The intricacy of Hoard objects contrasts with the popular image of the 'Dark Ages' characterised by P2 as 'just mud huts'. Similarly, modern-day Staffordshire is constructed as overlooked within national narratives; P2's

comment about the Hoard bringing more life to 'Mercia' effectively blurs the division between the forgotten Anglo-Saxon past and the present day 'forgetting' of the region. P3 takes up this notion of 'forgetting' and relates it to the heritage of Staffordshire specifically. In Ashworth and Graham's terms (2005, 5), if we 'create the heritage we require', here the Hoard is required to 'spotlight' Staffordshire in order to renew its place on the national stage. P3 stresses the benefits the Hoard will bring to the museum; P6 later expands on this point and more specifically positions the Hoard *within the museum* as a focus for local pride and celebration. P6 also explicitly links the local pride engendered by the discovery of the Hoard and the blow to pride caused by the loss of local industry. The acquisition of the Hoard thereby becomes not just a means of redressing lost knowledge of the 'Dark Ages' but also the more recent loss of prominent markers of identity associated with the pottery industry.

Such narratives echo findings from other post-industrial contexts. Research by both Newman and McLean (2006) and Walkerdine and Jiminez (2012) suggests that maintaining a sense of historical continuity can be an important focal point for post-industrial communities. It could be that emphasis on the craftsmanship and manufacture of Hoard objects attempts to project historical continuity of the community backwards to incorporate the Anglo-Saxon period. Smith (1986, 178) has argued that for a reconstruction of the past to serve modern purposes it must be 'in character'; 'it must intuitively 'belong to' or cohere with, a particular traditional past. Linking the Hoard with local crafts keeps it in character with pre-existing craft traditions. The Hoard is thus incorporated into narratives of community pride associated with the pottery industry, as well as a potential point of celebration to counteract the trauma associated with its loss.

The Hoard was explicitly associated with the pottery industry in the *Sentinel* newspaper, which often stressed the tourist potential of the Hoard alongside the attraction of the 'world-class collection of pottery and ceramics' in the Potteries Museum. Local commercial and artistic responses to the Hoard discovery often also deliberately invoke the ceramics tradition, whether by local firms designing limited edition vases to aid fundraising, or Stoke-on-Trent City Council commissioning the artist Katharine Morling to create ceramic sculptures inspired by figures within the Hoard.[6] The choice of ceramics shows how a Hoard of metalwork has been mediated by the more recent local industrial tradition to create a 'usable past'.

P4's comment about visitors having seen similar items in India is illuminating since her response is to ground the items in Staffordshire. Stressing to visitors that the Hoard was 'made here, and to do with Staffordshire' asserts the museum's right to the legal and moral

ownership of the Hoard. By stressing this local link, museum volunteers act as 'cultural intermediaries' in deciding the messages being encoded around the Hoard (Newman and McLean 2006). Dicks (2000, 148-51) argues that involving local volunteers in 'encoding' the past can empower local communities, but also indicated that Rhondda volunteers had felt marginalised when excluded from these processes. In comparison, volunteers at the Potteries expressed their surprise upon realising that 'experts', such as teachers, often lacked knowledge of the period. They felt empowered to use their newly acquired knowledge and drew on gallery resources to correct such misconceptions

> **P2**: One lady came in and went 'er, well no the Vikings were here before the Angl- and she was a teacher, she was a history teacher, and she was adamant the Vikings were here before the Anglo Saxons **[P3:** it's really sad**] [P5:** people do muddle them up**]** would you like to look at the timeline and just see, which is invaluable and **[P5:** it is good, the timeline**]** it is brilliant.'

In the next extract, participants discuss the successful fundraising campaign to keep the Staffordshire Hoard in the region. There is a clear expectation that the Hoard will 'put Stoke on the map', both for tourism and commerce. This exposes an ideological dilemma (Billig et al. 1988): it is vital that the international importance of the Hoard be recognised, however, the strength of local connection to the Hoard must also be continuously emphasised, since arguments for its international importance might push for it to be housed in a national museum. Thus, the Hoard cannot be constructed as either 'too parochial' or 'too global' in its appeal if 'heritage dissonance' is to be avoided (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996). Volunteers discussing the Hoard visitor profile make frequent corrections in order to maintain this equilibrium:

> **MC:**   I'm slightly curious as to what your impression is of the visitors. Do you, what sorts of people are they? Or what sorts of things do they have
>
> **P3:**   Every time they're different every time
>
> **MC:**   And are there a lot of local people?
>
> **P4:**   Yes.
>
> **P2:**   Yes, I mean say that was from when we first got the Hoard and we were doing it to raise money. The people who came, it was just absolutely fascinating, I mean that, I remember one particular one who was, I mean it was a family and it

was the grandfather and to be local he sounded, he looked like he came from the neck end of *[local place-name]* which is a fairly rough area to say the least and literally he got his wallet open and he sort of went, <u>my god</u>, the moths are flying today, and he put five pounds in to the box, and that would have been a huge amount to him but he was so passionate that it was here and it got to stay here

P3: The local pride was tremendous. It brought tears to your eyes I was doing gift aid at the time and people would give fifty pence if that's all they'd got, and the feeling to keep it local was just tremendous.

P2: And even now, people come and go, well I'm glad, it's not going to the British Museum, is it you know **[P4:** you hear that over and over**]** and you do have a bit of, well, has it got to be in Birmingham *(laughs)* there would, you know they would really like it here you know, sort of thing.

P3: But having said that we've had some people from Australia **[SX:** we've had people from all over**]** they'd planned to come anyway to Britain but then they planned it so they could come to the Hoard

P4: We do, in addition to what (P3)'s just said, we do get people from all over the world

P3's initial response stresses the heterogeneity of visitors to the exhibition, establishing that the Museum does not cater to a narrow demographic. Next, when asked about the prevalence of local people among visitors, P2 introduces a story about a local man donating money to the Hoard appeal. This is a good example of what Sacks (1995) has termed 'second stories', recounting a memory in order to make a point (Taylor 2010). The story emphasizes the importance of the Hoard to local, 'ordinary' people, and the anecdote of the grandfather with moths in his wallet accentuates this point. The wider narrative of deep local attachment to the Hoard is then co-constructed by P3 and P2, using affective language to describe a community brought together in pursuit of a common goal. This establishes a foundation narrative of the Hoard having been 'saved' through the collective small donations of ordinary local people, cementing a sense of local ownership of the Hoard. The Hoard is thereby positioned as a popular part of Staffordshire's place-identity, with locals glad that it has not been removed to the British Museum, and reluctant to share it even with Birmingham.

Having established the strength of local identification with the Hoard, there is a danger that it may appear merely of parochial interest, undermining previous claims of a heterogeneous visitor profile. A shift then follows where participants emphasize the international interest in the Hoard; taking up P3's reference to visitors from Australia, participants went on to mention visitors from China, Japan, North America, and the

Netherlands. In contrast with the earlier narrative of Staffordshire as 'forgotten', the Hoard allows Stoke-on-Trent to be constructed as a destination of worldwide note.

From the volunteers' perspective, the Hoard acts as a marker of identity for Staffordshire, both by providing a focus for local pride in keeping with established craft traditions, and by marking out Staffordshire on the national and international stage, thus rectifying a sense of marginalization. By possessing the Hoard objects, the museum can also claim possession of part of the Anglo-Saxon past, and thus of an 'English' history where Staffordshire was central; the worldwide, multinational interest in the Hoard supersedes arguments that such a focus could be problematic. However, in order to situate the Hoard as part of Staffordshire's authentic regional heritage, there is a need to stake a claim to ownership of the original 'authentic' Hoard objects.

Authenticity:

The importance of keeping the original Hoard objects in Staffordshire is arguably as much cultural and psychological as it is about the inherent material value of the objects. In an archaeological context, Jones (2010) argues that much of the power of artefacts is invested in their perceived 'authenticity', not defined simply by the originality of the objects but also produced through "the negotiation of inalienable relationships between objects, people and places":

> In respect to objects, it is the relationships embodied by their cultural biographies,
> from their origins to the present day, which inform the experience of authenticity
> and its powerful impact on people's lives (Jones 2010, 198).

The dense Staffordshire soil or 'mud' which caked the artefacts when they were first displayed [Fig. 3] has become part of their 'cultural biography', and acted alongside the campaign to 'save' the Hoard to form perceptions of it as local and authentic, reinforcing the link with Staffordshire and its people. A local newspaper editorial of an early display of Hoard objects at the Potteries Museum was headed *'Treasures of Staffordshire Hoard are muddy marvellous'*, associating the soil covering the artefacts with belonging and ownership of the Hoard:

> In a way, that clinging dirt was symbolic of Staffordshire not wanting to give up
> one of the most remarkable archaeological treasures ever found in this country.
> (*Sentinel*, 8 February 2010)

Following acquisition, the Hoard was similarly described as returning to its 'home soil' (17 April 2010), and a Stoke Councillor invited as many visitors as possible to 'share in the wonder' of how the items 'became buried in Staffordshire soil all those centuries ago' (23 July 2010). Conservation and research requirements dictated that Hoard objects were initially consolidated for stability rather than cleaned; so objects were first displayed with soil adhering to their surface. This pragmatic early decision has been woven into narratives of authenticity around the Hoard. The soil has become shorthand, or a 'material metaphor' (Tilley 1996), for the very concept of 'belonging'; its presence encodes this recent discovery with a deeper past, situated in a network of belonging with the landscape and people of Staffordshire.

<Figure 3 >

Within the focus group, the soil also acted as a means of distinguishing the real, 'authentic' objects from replicas. While acknowledging the value of replicas for display and interpretive purposes, the group were unanimous in their preference for 'the real thing', a point emphasised below in their comparison with Anglo-Saxon displays at Sutton Hoo (Suffolk):

> **P2:** I know my brother went to Sutton Hoo and he was devastated at the fact that it was majority replicas
>
> **P4:** So was I because I'd driven all the way down to Suffolk and I didn't realise that it was all replicas and yeah they're lovely, and you can say, ooh ah **[P2:** yeah, you want to get a feel for it**]** but you want to see the real thing, not be told go to the British Museum
>
> **P3:** It's the connection again, isn't it those people in that time.
>
> **MS:** Mm, well I was going to bring up precisely that point, (P3), because I know, (P1) before she left had written down about connections. I wonder is it the very, the fact that these are physical objects that you can actually see **[P2:** yeah**]** makes the connection to that time **[P2:** yeah, yeah**]** almost more?
>
> **P5:** And I think up to a point when they were still dirty, the dirt, just the dirt on them made people connect with them more because we did not know their story if you like before they were buried, their story as far as we know only happens to them after they're buried and dug up and the fact that some of them still had dirt on them made them very immediate to people you know, they haven't just been lying around in a museum for decades, they've only just come in fresh out the ground
>
> **P3:** Well this was the thing **[P2:** they didn't believe it, did they?**]** we were the first people to see them since goodness knows when and we didn't realise then how

valuable the mud was **[P2:** no**]** because the mud tells us a lot, seeds, pollen and
whatever, you know bits of fabric maybe,

      The collective focus here is not only on having the 'real things' but on having them in
the right place; removing the objects to the British Museum like the Sutton Hoo artefacts
would somehow diminish their attraction. A transactional element emerges whereby the
'authentic' becomes product (Macdonald, 2013); having invested the effort to travel, the
heritage consumer expects to see the 'real things' within the 'correct' landscape. However,
there are more than economic considerations at work: the housing of these artefacts within
the Potteries Museum has become a form of affective place-identification to which
authenticity is key. P3's suggestion that the 'real thing' creates a connection to 'those people
in that time' echoes Jones' contention that the 'web of relationships' which objects invoke
with 'past and present people and places' are crucial in situating them as 'authentic' (Jones
2009; 2010). P5 specifically invokes the dirt attached to the Hoard objects as crucial to the
story of the Hoard and its immediacy; the almost horticultural imagery associated with the
objects having arrived 'fresh out of the ground' constructs them as organic, living things, as
opposed to something that had 'just been lying around in a museum for decades'.

      Jones (2009, 137) has argued that 'the materiality of objects embodies the past
experiences and relationships that they have been part of and facilitates some kind of
ineffable contact with those experiences and relationships'. The materiality of the
Staffordshire Hoard seems to be enhanced by the soil, which acts as proof that 'we were the
first people to see them since goodness knows when'; representing a direct link with an
Anglo-Saxon past. P3's comment that 'the mud tells us a lot' thus has a double meaning; the
mud has a lot to tell both in scientific, and in narrative terms.

      The notion of the Hoard as a 'living thing' was mentioned often, with both the Hoard
as a whole and individual items being anthropomorphised:

P3: It is because I get really upset when it has to go somewhere I'm very
possessive

P6: Yes when you know some pieces are going and it could be your favourite
piece

P2: Well we all come in and we go, well what's gone or what have we got back

P3: Or why should it go there?

P2: And sort of, and when we

P3: You do get very emotional

P2: When the new exhibition came and you know started, 'cos we thought we
were going to lose, I thought we were going to lose so many of **[P4:** yeah**]** the
good pieces, and I actually walked in and went, ooh we've still got that, we've
still got that *(laughs)*.

P4: We've got the seahorse

Jones' (2009) research on local identification with the medieval Pictish Hilton of
Cadboll cross-slab illustrated that residents saw it as a living member of the Highland
community, with any prospect of removal or relocation of the slab representing a
'problematic dislocation'. There are notable similarities with this extract, where the
participants describe individual Hoard items in terms of emotional attachment, and their
temporary removal as an upsetting loss. While the Staffordshire Hoard has indeed been
'saved' from permanent removal from the locality, the display at Stoke varies as some objects
undergo research and others are transferred for display at different sites on the 'Mercian
Trail'. As such, the 'problematic dislocation' felt by the participants refers not so much to the
removal of individual 'favourite' Hoard pieces, such as the 'seahorse' [Fig. 4], from the
locality but specifically from the museum. The 'we' referred to by the participants refers to
the museum community, and reflects how, for this group of volunteers, belonging and
identification with the museum is intertwined with an emotional attachment to the Hoard.
Given the role of the museum volunteers in mediating the Hoard for both local and
international visitors, this emotional attachment to the objects lends resonance to their
'belonging' to Staffordshire. It also demonstrates how, for the volunteers, the presence of the
Hoard in the museum goes beyond economic and tourism considerations to become about
affective ownership.

<Figure 4>

Conclusion: A marker of the past, a marker in the present

The Staffordshire Hoard shows that public interest in new discoveries can stimulate non-
visitors into rethinking what Merriman (1991) has termed cultural and social aversions to
visiting museums. Local volunteers support this process and are 'active in appropriating their
own heritage', encouraging new learning and harnessing community feeling (Orr 2006, 202).
A representative from the Potteries Museum suggested that, in customer feedback, the use of

volunteer hosts was one of the 'most successful' aspects of the exhibition. It has been argued that volunteers are both a resource and an audience for museums (Goodlad and McIvor 1998) but are potentially a 'neglected' part of its audience, motivated by enjoyment (Holmes 2003). Focus-group volunteers were clear that, while motivated by the desire to help in the local community, there was also a desire for personal development or 'serious leisure' (Orr 2006). A significant part of their satisfaction with the role came from working alongside salaried staff and the privileged access to knowledge and support this offers. Volunteers maintain positive identities as a key part of the museum community by developing working relationships with staff and other volunteers as well as museum visitors, and through the recognition and awards that Staffordshire Hoard exhibitions have received, thereby contributing to the long term sustainability of the Hoard.

Research on the Staffordshire Hoard is ongoing. In scholarly circles, it has entered debates about how the groups who became known as Angles and Saxons came to identify themselves with the landscape of Britain, how elites maintained their status and developed a new Christian identity, and how they interacted with an existing British population. The campaign to acquire the Hoard is cited as a model for successful museum fundraising (French and Runyard 2011). Nevertheless, despite strong public support, local museums have also been substantially outbid for metal-detected finds which did not qualify as 'treasure': e.g. the Crosby Garrett Roman Helmet, made of copper alloy, which reached £2m at auction (Worrell 2010). Academic coverage of the Staffordshire Hoard itself has reflected on the difficulties of the early investigation (Carver 2011), and some argue that the display of a single assemblage across multiple locations may 'obscure its archaeological value' (James 2011, 1071). Notwithstanding these concerns and with the Hoard's historical meanings yet to be fully understood, these exhibitions allow modern meanings to be negotiated and sustained. The varied themes addressed by different Mercian Trail sites – the Hoard's Christian past at Lichfield Cathedral, its conservation at Birmingham, or its archaeological significance at Stoke-on-Trent – alongside the use of local volunteers may help to avoid 'dissonance' for the Staffordshire Hoard in its interpretation.

Many of the individual objects uncovered were markers of personal and group identity in the distant past and collectively, as a newly-discovered Hoard, they have become a marker of identity in contemporary Staffordshire. Volunteers help visitors to frame the objects within overlapping identifications: past and present; within the museum itself; between local, regional, national and international contexts. Within this nexus, the emphasis on having the right things – objects rather than replicas – in the right place is given emotional

resonance by volunteer attachment to specific objects. A sense of ownership and belonging, verified by the presence of 'Staffordshire soil', is accentuated by situating the Hoard within local craft traditions. In Jones' (2009, 2010) terms, it is possible to trace networks of inalienable relationships between people, objects, and places incorporating the Staffordshire Hoard: this analysis has demonstrated the important role of the museum volunteers in co-constructing the narratives that give voice to these relationships and, in so doing, mediating wider understandings of the significance of the Hoard.

Public interest in the Staffordshire Hoard discovery and support for the fundraising campaign has created a new regional context for the Anglo-Saxon past. Alongside its high media profile, the naming of the 'Staffordshire Hoard' has helped to frame the modern identity and relevance of these ancient artefacts for local people, stimulating for some a strong emotional attachment and a sense of ownership and belonging. This may explain why Stoke, the county deposit museum for Staffordshire archaeological finds, is portrayed as a more 'natural home' for the Hoard than Birmingham, despite being twice the distance from the findspot. Such responses may also reflect existing attitudes to Birmingham, as the dominant 'metropolis', and other relations historically embedded within the region (Capper, Scully & Brown in prep.). Public reflection on the Hoard and its discovery has opened up cultural and psychological space for consideration and negotiation of Staffordshire's current position within the nation. A new engagement with the Anglo-Saxon past has become a way to challenge the region's post-industrial marginalisation, and build a new regional identity, which incorporates existing pride in craftwork as a response to a perception of past skills and regional prominence being 'forgotten'.

As research progresses, it will be useful to consider how identity narratives founded on the Hoard's 'Staffordshireness' respond to the probability that its constituent objects were produced elsewhere. How will completion of the cleaning and conservation of these objects impact on the present clear dichotomy between 'authentic', soil-encrusted objects compared to their replicas? If the current power of the Hoard to attract identification rests on its provisionality, as suggested here, what will happen when more is known? Equally, how will such developments interact with broader questions of regional identity that have resurfaced in contemporary politics, both in England in response to the referendum on Scottish independence and for corresponding questions of regional autonomy throughout Europe? Will 'Mercia', for so long a forgotten footnote in English history, begin to re-enter contemporary popular and political discourse? The prospect of the campaign to 'save' the Staffordshire Hoard prefiguring a popular sentiment for greater local and regional autonomy

is an intriguing one, and suggests that archaeological discoveries can re-awaken unresolved dissonance in regional identities.

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Table 1: Select data from 'West Midlands Report Card: Disaggregated Report Card April 2011-March 2012', from the Renaissance Hub Museum Exit Survey, 2012.

	Potteries Museum (PMAG) Stoke-on-Trent	National Average
Gender	65% female	59% female
UK & C2DE Economic group	45%	28%
Visited 0 other museums and galleries in the last 12 months	42%	18%
Yearly visits to PMAG Yearly visits to other Museums/Galleries	6 2.33	4.36 5.68
Education	28% no GCSE/O-levels 24% GCSE/O-levels 21% degree	11% no GCSE/O-levels 15% GCSE and O-levels 44% degree

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[2] Funded by DCMS to encourage voluntary recording of archaeological objects found by the public in England and Wales; http://www.finds.org.uk.

[3] Papers from a PAS symposium on the Staffordshire Hoard: http://finds.org.uk/staffshoardsymposium

[4] Figures provided by the Potteries Museum.

[5] These extracts have been modified slightly to ensure anonymity and legibility.

[6] 'Morling and the Hoard' was funded by Arts Council England's Cultural Olympiad programme.