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Of course, there can be archaeology without digging. The term 'archaeology of science' - for instance - has been applied to the study of the material remains of science, including scientific instruments. Any systematic elucidation of a contextualized body of historical remains is an archaeology. Anyway, most archaeology is the study of refuse; in that sense what gets lost or swept under a floorboard is as eloquent, or as ineloquent, a witness to its time as what gets buried in a back yard.

It was with these thoughts in mind that sorting began of the material, reported in the last issue of *Sphæra*, discovered under floorboards on the top floor of the Museum. Present in the greatest quantities are scraps of paper, fragments of the shells of nuts (hazelnuts in the most part), fruit stones (mainly of cherries), and stalks and leaves from both the latter. What we have here (leaving aside the paper) is an insight into the dietary habits of someone in the old Museum, as well as into the between-meals precursors of crisps and chocolate bars.

Also in fair quantities, as might be expected, are chunks of stone, cement, and plaster from the building itself; miscellaneous fragments and offcuts of wood; broken glass of various kinds, at least one piece thought to be a light from the original 17th-century leaded windows; and a lovely collection of about forty old iron nails.

The inevitable ordinary lost coins consist of three copper halfpennies, including a common one of George II dated 1734 and a rarer William and Mary of 1694, the latter very worn, meaning that it was lost after many years of circulation. A small silver coin of Pope Innocent XII dated 1692 is more likely to be a lost item from the Ashmolean Museum collection.

A penknife, still very sharp, with a handle covered in typical 18th-century style with tortoise-shell laid over gold leaf, was one of the few largish objects found. Some oddly shaped strips of thin wood, at first accorded the status of 'mystery objects', were surprisingly identified as the struts of a fan, originally linked by pink paper, several pieces of which also survive.

Little in the way of livestock was to be found in the dust - though two creatures are particularly intriguing. The lower part (tail and back legs) of a lizard of some kind was so dry and pale that it nearly got classified as a twig. Clearly it must be the remains of a lost or discarded Museum specimen.

Another, with its number '94' still attached, looks at first like a small wooden disc or tag, and only a magnifying glass reveals it as the scaly, spiky exoskeleton of an echinoderm, or starfish, four of its five legs broken off, but the centre intact. The Ashmolean's second Keeper Edward Lhuys was the founder of the scientific study of echinoderms, and gave a lecture course on the subject in the Museum in the early 1700s. It is reasonable to assume that this specimen is one of his.

A child's tooth, several small ivory objects (including a beautiful relief carving of foliage, less than an inch in diameter), wax seals, bottle corks, pottery and clay pipe fragments, a clay marble, a wooden spatula (used by a decorator or plasterer), several flowers, some nice samples of coloured cotton or silk threads, remnants of quill pens and of pencils, are among the other wide-ranging miscellany of things which have been extracted from the dust.

The paper that has been found ranges from minute fragments to a whole segment (thirty-two pages) of a Greek and Latin New Testament (probably 16th-century but still in use in the eighteenth); via pieces of coarse wrapping paper, printed handbills and advertisements, an old parchment document in the process of being cut up and re-used, a handwritten label to 'Esther Lady Wotton' (a painting which used to hang on the stairs), one complete letter (from one J. Chapman to his son, 1763), and numerous fragmentary manuscripts, most of them deliberately torn up.

The latter require more study, but include fragments of letters, Museum documents, and student-type Latin exercises, at least one scientific note (an astronomical observation or calculation), and plenty of scribbles and doodles, including one reading 'RP. you son of a whore / 1763'.

Like pottery in excavation archaeology, paper provides the key to dating in floorboard archaeology, not just because it contains some actual dates but because it is fairly obvious which papers are contemporary with the date of deposit, as distinct from things that were already old by the time they were lost or discarded (like coins or dead lizards).

If there are a few odds and ends from earlier and later periods, there is an overwhelming 18th-century feel to the majority of this material, and a definite clustering of dates in the early and mid 1760s. Several papers are dated 1763 and 1764. Time and again research into the undated papers throws up the same period - for example, a newspaper fragment referring to a European war and mentioning Paris points to 1763 (when the Treaty of Paris ended the Seven Years War); and a handbill advertising a new edition of Fox's *Book of Martyrs* turns out to be that of 1761.

The Ashmolean Museum is often thought to have been decadent and neglectful in the 18th century. It did go through such periods of neglect, one of which preceded William Huddesford's appointment as Keeper in 1755. Many things had been lost or (less avoidably) become badly decayed; and it was earlier in the same year that a famous disposal of irremediably decayed organic specimens (which included the celebrated Dodo) took place.

But Huddesford (1732-72) was a conscientious curator. He reviewed the collections, improved their storage and display, revised the catalogues, and carried out research himself, his special interest being the life and collections of the most distinguished of his predecessors, Edward Lhuys. By the time of his early death he had (as R. F. Ovenell, the Ashmolean's historian concluded) 'worked hard to restore order to its collections and to reinstate its good name, and he had succeeded'. So the late 1750s and the 1760s was a time of positive, energetic activity in the Museum. This does not preclude Huddesford's young assistants being untidy, nor the accumulation of rubbish associated with curatorial work - indeed, it is reorganization and the restoring of order, rather than neglect, that produces such by-products.

The curatorial debris includes pieces of pill-boxes - the small cylindrical wooden boxes typically used by collectors and museums in the 18th century. Several are inscribed with numbers, and one with the name 'Knock na Re slego', indicating that it had contained a geological specimen or fossil from Knocknarea, a hill to the west of Sligo in Ireland, almost certainly one collected by Edward Lhuys when he toured there in 1699.

A more modest housekeeping improvement (not otherwise recorded) was evidently to renew the labelling of the keys to the storage cabinets, as indicated by the presence under the floorboards of not one but ten discarded handwritten key tags.

In the late 18th century the Museum had two assistant posts, whose duties included showing the collection to visitors and supervising the library, which was housed in the two small rooms at the top of the stairs. Huddesford employed a succession of his own pupils from Trinity College, where he was a fellow and tutor, in these positions. The names of two in particular - Joseph Chapman and Richard Parker - emerge from the floorboard manuscripts.

Joseph Chapman (1743-1808) worked at the Ashmolean from 1760 to 1765, beginning as the junior assistant but within a few months becoming the senior, or Underkeeper, though he was only seventeen years old. For most of his time as an undergraduate he was thus also working in the Ashmolean; he graduated in 1763. Classics was the staple subject of study, hence the Latin manuscripts and printed texts.

But Chapman also studied science, as we learn from his father's letter, promising to send him a 'Quadrant and two books of maps'. He was doubtless attending Thomas Hornsby's first lecture course in the Museum's scientific lecture room on the middle floor. He subsequently became a college teacher himself, and rose to become the President of Trinity College in 1776, and in 1784-88 Vice-Chancellor of the University.

From 1761 to 1763 he was joined in the Ashmolean by Richard Parker, also from Trinity College, who although only slightly older than Chapman had come to Oxford three years earlier and already graduated. This must have created a rather odd if good-humoured relationship, reflected to some extent in the manuscript ephemera.

It is tempting and perhaps not unduly imaginative to form a picture of the two of them, at a desk on the top landing or in the Keeper's Study, doodling their way through periods of unsupervised idleness as they wait to show visitors around the Museum, writing scurrilous notes to each other in between transcribing entries into the new Museum catalogue, reading *The Life and Adventures of a Reformed Magdalen* (1763) or, more studiously, doing their Latin exercises, while munching on nuts and cherries, spitting the stones into a dusty corner.

An obvious instinct is to highlight the attractive and valuable amongst the finds, or those which may be lost items from the collections. However, genuine rubbish like the fruit and nut remnants is actually rarer to find, especially coming from a datable context. Such finds illuminate the people and practices of the time in a new way. For all the paper in our archives and libraries, there are far fewer specimens of ordinary shopkeeper's wrapping paper than there are of ancient papyrus.