



NEW ANGLO-SAXON AND
MEDIEVAL GALLERY FOR
THE ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM

The Alfred Jewel, the most precious relic of its age. Late 9th century AD. Presented in 1718.



The prophet Moses, a Romanesque bronze figure, perhaps from a shrine. 12th century AD.



AMONGST THE MANY collections that combine to make the Ashmolean one of the principal centres of archaeological excellence in Britain, the Anglo-Saxon and medieval antiquities occupy a leading position.

When the world-famous Alfred Jewel entered the collection in 1718 there was as yet little conception of the nature of Anglo-Saxon material culture, but the Jewel at least had the benefit of an integral inscription recording proudly that 'Alfred ordered me to be made'. In the later eighteenth century, excavations by the Revd James Douglas opened a new chapter in the investigation of Anglo-Saxon England, as published in his elegant folio *Nenia Britannica* (1793). Douglas's finds were placed on display at the Ashmolean in the 1820s, at a time when no comparable material could be seen anywhere else in England, and

the Museum's lead in this field was consolidated by further finds from excavations in the mid-nineteenth century at Fairford by William Wylie, and in the Oxford region by Stephen Stone and J.Y. Akermann.

The appointment of E.T. Leeds to the Ashmolean almost a century ago heralded the arrival of the era of research in which we still find ourselves today, for his work on the (by now extensive) collections allowed him to formulate the first systematic surveys of Anglo-Saxon England. Leeds tested and expanded upon these surveys with his own excavations on local cemeteries and settlement sites, which formed the basis of his fundamental texts, *The Archaeology of the Anglo-Saxon Settlements* (1913) and *Early Anglo-Saxon Art and Archaeology* (1936).

Chimney-pot or louvre, formerly mounted on a roof in the High Street, Oxford. Smoke would have escaped from its eyes, mouth, ears and nose. 14th century AD.

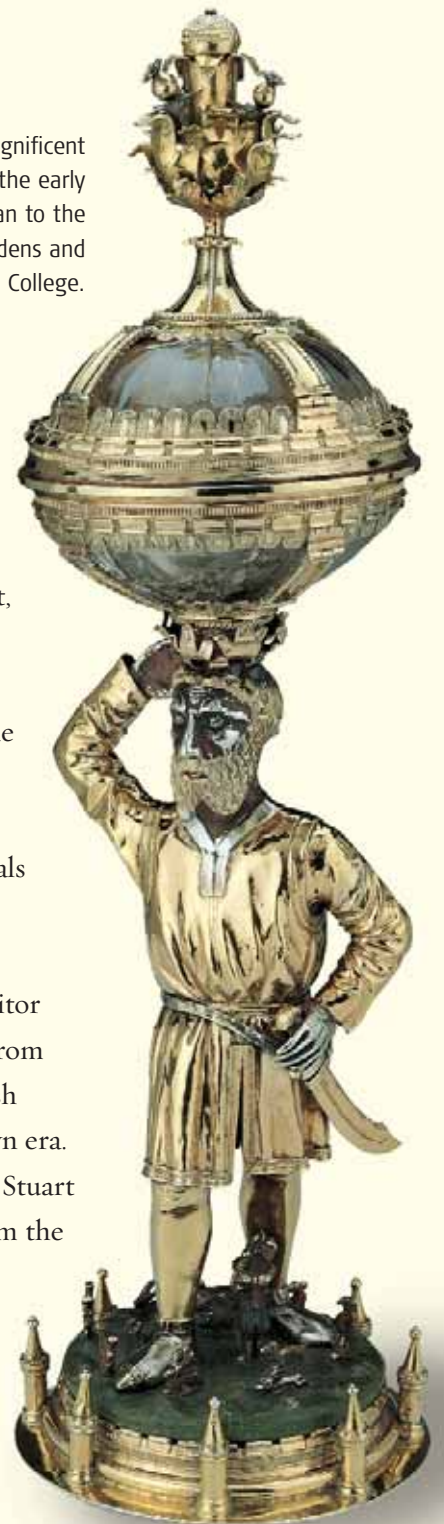
The most up-to-date excavation practice, represented by material recovered from Berinsfield in the 1990s, rests on the work of these early pioneers who established this – the founding collection for the whole of Anglo-Saxon archaeology.

As well as forming one of the most extensive and coherent collections of its type in England, therefore, the material in the Ashmolean represents a complete time-capsule of Anglo-Saxon archaeology from its beginnings up to the present day.

WHILE the earliest medieval objects arrived with the Ashmolean's opening in 1683, this rudimentary collection received a boost with rich bequests of continental material from the collector C.D.E. Fortnum (d. 1899) and other (mostly archaeological) objects from Sir John Evans (d. 1908). To a large degree, the disparate characters of these two collections – one accumulated on the basis of art-historical connoisseurship and the other shaped by the antiquarian interests of one of the foremost archaeologists of his day – were perpetuated by their assignation to the Departments of Western Art and Antiquities respectively, but the new gallery offers the prospect of reuniting a large part of this material in a fully integrated display illustrating a wide cross-section of social life in a comprehensive manner.

The All Souls Salt, a magnificent silver-gilt table piece of the early 15th century AD. On loan to the Ashmolean from the Wardens and Fellows of All Souls College.

THE range of materials that can be deployed to this end is truly impressive. Major themes that may be investigated include religion, social and economic development, domestic and courtly life, dress, weapons and warfare; good collections also exist of small-scale sculpture in bronze, ivory and alabaster, while metalwork is also well represented. Coins and medals will be used to help place this material within a firm historical framework accessible to every visitor and spanning the entire period, from the emergence of a unified English nation to the threshold of our own era. A strong collection of Tudor and Stuart material allows the transition from the medieval to the early modern period to be completed in an unbroken manner.



Ivory crosier-head, counterposing the Paschal Lamb with the jaws of Hell. 12th century AD. Presented in 1685.



The seal-matrix of the University of Oxford, reading SIGILL' CANCELLARII ET UNIVERSITATIS OXONIENS'. 13th century AD.

Gold and garnet disc-brooch from Sarre, Kent. 6th century AD. Found in 1841 by a labourer digging in the chalk.

appeal. In no other museum will it be possible to see such a comprehensive display of the progress of Anglo-Saxon and medieval England within a single, purpose-built space. The potential benefit of this undertaking is clear: a superlative collection will be presented in a first-rate gallery.

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This prestigious new gallery at the Ashmolean will allow the expansion and enhancement of the display of those collections already held by the Ashmolean. It also presents an unprecedented opportunity for many of the medieval treasures currently housed inaccessibly in the colleges of the University to be attracted to the Museum and set before the public in a display of real significance. All Souls has recently shown the way by placing on long-term loan the magnificent salt which formerly graced the high table, while the recent 'Gothic' and 'College Silver' exhibitions have each given glimpses of the tremendous impact that could be made by inviting the collaboration of the colleges in mobilizing these little-known resources.

The educational scope of such a gallery is no less impressive than its visual



The Thame Reliquary Ring. The ring's cover can be removed to reveal a cavity for a relic, perhaps a splinter from the True Cross. 14th century AD. Found with coins and further rings in the Thame Hoard, 1940.

The
Ashmolean

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