

University Museums Group Member Projects Case Study

Case study title	Learning together: Haida people, Haida collections, and the Pitt Rivers Museum
Institution name	Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford
Summary [100-150 words. What is this case study about? What was the problem, issue or challenge and how did you tackle it?]	How do museums create ongoing relationships with overseas indigenous communities around the collections from those communities? How can both the museum and its staff and audiences, and the community, benefit from working together around the collections? Supported by a Leverhulme International Networks grant, we invited a group of Haida artists and elders to work with the Haida collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum. They benefited from seeing historic masterpieces and cultural treasures: artists learned technique and refined form, language terms were retrieved, memories recorded of traditional life. The Museum gained information on nearly all 300 objects studied. We are now looking together at future projects to sustain our relationship: an internship at PRM? A placement at the Haida Cultural Centre? The carving of a replica box to match a masterpiece and take home to Haida communities? We hope all of these and more will happen in the future.
Keywords [please choose up to 5 keywords to describe your project which will help members to find your project within the website database.]	Haida; Indigenous source community; collaboration
Background [100 words. Give brief details of your Museum/Gallery and any relevant background to the project.]	The Pitt Rivers Museum is a museum of world cultures from all periods of history; it is famous for its Victorian-inspired displays and cutting-edge ethnographic curation. We have worked with Indigenous communities in North America for over a decade to create access to collections and learn about them.
Objectives [100 words. Describe the objective(s) behind the project.]	To bring the Pitt Rivers Museum and an Indigenous community from whom the Museum holds historic collections together in a permanent and mutually supportive relationship, to explore what our different needs and goals are, and to explore ways of meeting these and maintaining a relationship in the long term.
Project details [400 words. What did you do? This might also include details of project partners, financial and staff implications etc.]	With a Leverhulme International Networks grant, we were able to hire Dr Cara Krmpotich, a specialist on Haida culture, as network facilitator. Krmpotich organized the visit and ensured the smooth coordination of retrieval, photography, and conservation of 300 objects and the addition of information into the database following the visit. Since the entire Museum staff was involved, and a large group of Haidas travelling from abroad (some for the first time overseas), the facilitator was essential. We also worked with the British Museum and took the Haida delegates to see collections in their storage facility. This was a logistically demanding project, requiring extensive travel arrangements, new techniques for managing a large number of objects being processed over a 6-month lead-in period and then put away after the visit. We also trained Museum staff in cross-

	<p>cultural skills for recording information and working with Haidas in the object handling sessions. It was a joy to see real expertise brought by Haidas to the objects, to see objects danced, to hear traditional stories told about the crest figures decorating Haida objects, and to witness public dance performances and demonstrations.</p>
<p>Project outcomes and impact [200 words. How did this project make a difference to your museum?]</p>	<p>The photographs of Haida objects were posted on Flickr, our first experiment with that site, and attracted positive comments from Haidas who were not able to come to the UK. We are now working on a book about the project and its process, which will be co-authored with Haida participants. Artists have taken inspiration from historic collections in the making of new works, and want very much to return to copy a box in the PRM collections. UK project staff travelled to Haida Gwaii in August 2010 to consult with Haida delegates there about future work together, and we hope to sponsor an intern in the UK for training and to do placements to train staff at the Haida Gwaii Museum. While there, UK staff also worked to begin a facilities report for the Haida Gwaii Museum, so that it can accept loans of treasures held in the UK. PRM has new educational material for public programs which we hope to improve again soon with Haida help, and we anticipate several podcasts and new display labels as a result. And, we have Haida colleagues to whom we can turn for answers to cultural and ethical display issues.</p>
<p>What went well? [200 words – what were the most successful outcomes or learning points of the project?]</p>	<p>Getting to know Haida people and their perspectives on historic treasures; the dance/public performances and art demos, which were enthusiastically given and received; the mutual respect that developed between PRM staff and Haidas during the object study sessions, as we all came to recognize each others' knowledge. And the great respect shown by Museum staff, who agreed to active forms of object handling such as dance (for some masks and dance paddles), so that Haidas could feel a deep sense of reconnection with the collections.</p>
<p>What could have been done better? [200 words – barriers , failures and things that could have gone better provide some of the most valuable learning points for others.]</p>	<p>The length of the Haida visit to the UK was 3 weeks, which was a long time to be away from home in strange environments. We didn't have budget for as much video/audio recording as we would have liked, and we had too many eager volunteer note-takers: it was difficult to get a balance between learning for the Museum's records and not interfering with Haidas' learning from the artefacts.</p>
<p>Conclusions and recommendations for the future [150 words. Briefly identify the most important points in the case study for others and where this project might lead in the future.]</p>	<p>This required a great deal of planning and logistical coordination inside the Museum and for the travel aspect of the project; a dedicated post was needed to facilitate the project. We also found that we needed to invent new ways of storing a sub-collection in active use for some 9 months during preparation for the visit and during the visit; we needed to think through how objects would be presented to Haidas, and deal with emotional, cross-cultural interaction during the study sessions: this sort of project requires mentoring from those who have the ethnographic and cross-cultural skills and who have done such handling/study sessions before. It's worth it, though!</p>

Image [please attach an image connected to the project.]



Contact name and email address
[contact details for someone connected with the project who is willing to share more information with members.]

Dr Laura Peers
Curator (Americas)
Pitt Rivers Museum
Laura.peers@prm.ox.ac.uk

Date of submission

27 September 2010