

The archaeology of childhood: A museum perspective.

Arqueología de la infancia: miradas desde el museo

SHARON BROOKSHAW

University of Gloucestershire, Cheltenham, UK
sharonbrookshaw@yahoo.co.uk

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the archaeology of children and childhood from a museum perspective with the aim of illustrating that children from the deeper past can and should be included in museum exhibitions, and that archaeologists should consider museum collections a resource for furthering understanding of children in the past. It presents data from recent research illustrating the range of material culture relating to children that is held in the accredited museums of mainland Britain, with a particular emphasis on archaeological objects and collections. The results of a survey examining the attitudes and ideas of curators in regard to exhibiting this material and including children in museum displays are also provided, and some examples of relevant museum exhibitions discussed.

KEY WORDS: *Material culture. Children. Childhood. Museum. Collection. Exhibition.*

RESUMEN

Este texto discute la arqueología de los niños y de la infancia desde la perspectiva del museo con el fin de ilustrar, por una parte, cómo los niños del pasado más remoto pueden y deben ser incluidos en las exposiciones de los museos y por otra, que la Arqueología debería considerar las colecciones de los museos como un recurso para entender mejor a los niños del pasado. Se presentan datos de una investigación reciente que muestra el rango de cultura material relacionada con los niños que existe en los museos de Gran Bretaña, con un énfasis particular en los objetos arqueológicos y en las colecciones. Por otra parte, se dan a conocer los resultados del estudio realizado acerca de las actitudes y las ideas de los conservadores de los museos en lo que se refiere a la exhibición de estos materiales y de la inclusión de la infancia en las exposiciones, además de discutir algunas exposiciones relevantes.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Cultura material. Niños. Infancia. Museos. Colecciones. Exposiciones.*

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1. Introduction

In 1921, Alfred Heneage Cocks excavated a Roman villa site at Hambleton in Buckinghamshire. At this time a large number of villa sites had been discovered and excavated in Britain, and the distinctive form of the villa was well known; Hambleton Villa proved ultimately to be an unremarkable example of Romano-British architecture, comprising a corridor house with a courtyard, and numerous outbuildings with agricultural installations (Scott 1999: 110). However, what was remarkable about this site was the discovery of large numbers of inhumations in the grounds, including ninety-seven apparently newborn infants buried in a separate cemetery to that used for the older children and adults in the community (Baxter 2005: 98). In the excavator's own words, "a remarkable feature of this excavation was that the ground, roughly speaking throughout the northern half, was littered with babies. They numbered ninety-seven and most of them are newly born...As nothing marked the position of these tiny graves, a second little corpse was sometimes deposited on one already in occupation of a spot" (Heneage Cocks 1921, quoted in Scott 1999: 110). Explanations centring on poverty, illegitimacy and infanticide were put forward to explain this unusual find, although a satisfactory explanation of this separation of infants was never produced (Scott 1999: 110).

This was not the end of the unusual treatment of the Hambleton Villa infants, however. Recent work following up on these finds discovered that the excavated material had been passed on to local museums to be curated – while the adult remains had all been placed into documented storage and had therefore survived, the infant bones had at some point either been declined or disposed of, and no records were kept about them (Gowland, *pers. comm.*)¹. Given that the infant burials were one of the key features that made this site unusual, this seems an unexpected decision for the museum to have made. It appears to highlight the insignificance that infants were considered to have in relation to the adult remains by the museum in question (Gowland, *pers. comm.*). This striking example also illustrates the impact that museums can have on how the theme of children and childhood is collected and exhibited within museums: a decision by a museum worker to not keep these infant burials not only removed a significant research

opportunity for the study of Romano-British children, but also a unique exhibition potential to bring to public attention the role and activities of children in the past. There is therefore an important link between the archaeology of children and childhood, and the roles museums play; museums can act not only as a repository of materials to be studied via their collections, but also can interpret and exhibit these materials in their galleries, acting as a means of education and information about children in the past.

For archaeologists, the reconstruction of historical contexts relating to children is a uniquely difficult and interesting one. A great distance seems to exist between children and the physical remains of the past that survive to be interpreted, and the written past is often not much assistance given the dominance of adult agency, both in the past as the recorders and the present as the interpreters. The difficulty of identifying children as distinct and separate from adults in the archaeological record, the relatively low survival rate of infant bones, and the generic and ephemeral activities of children have all been given as reasons for the absence of children in the interpretation of the archaeological record (Wileman 2005: 8). The tendency of modern adults to marginalise children and see them as passive has only served to compound this difficulty, and up until relatively recently, it was considered that "the child's world has been left out of archaeological research" (Lillehammer 1989: 89). Indeed, it has even been noted that, "dogs have been more studied than children in the archaeological record" (Moore 1997: 255) and by 1998, Park still felt able to say that, "world-wide, the archaeological investigation of childhood seems still to be in its infancy" (1998: 269). However, the demographic reality of children means it is increasingly becoming accepted that, "children contribute to the archaeological record whether or not we are competent to recognise them" (Chamberlain 1997: 249). This absence of children in archaeological literature been increasingly noted (Sofaer 1994; Kamp 2001) and arguments put forward for archaeologists to include children when they are writing research designs, as they would have been present at almost every site studied (Wileman 2005: 7).

While archaeology has been slow to take an interest in children, museums have likewise had little consideration of them outside of the popula-

richness of social history displays “content with portraying the childhood of the Edwardian nursery, the innocence of the gingham dress and the sailor suit, the Meccano set, the teddy bear, the doll’s pram” (Fleming 1989: 31). Museum collections are a fundamental resource for material evidence (Pearce 1994: 15) and, despite the idiosyncrasy of their assemblages, present a unique and intriguing opportunity for examining objects related to children and childhood. While museums have over recent years moved to be more inclusive in their collection strategies and displays, there is still evidence that children, despite being a large group with wide relevance to visitors, have not much benefitted from such policies. Museums are largely still thinking of society as being composed only of adults, and this lack of acceptance or recognition of age stratification is omitting children, from being fairly represented within their displays and collections. Indeed, this omission has even been termed “the last frontier” (Shepherd 2001a: 1) in the social role of museums, reflecting the fact that children (and the related “childhood”) are largely insignificant or invisible in mainstream (i.e. not specific “childhood”) exhibitions. If children have been so widely ignored in archaeology and in museums, what is the situation when the archaeology of children and childhood is considered from a museum perspective?

2. Children, material culture and museums

Children are a universal minority in all societies, both now and in the past, with their experiences defined not only by their age, legal status, physical maturity and power relations with adults, but also by materiality (Sofaer 2000: 5). Cunningham (1995: 1) relates the diary narrative of an 11-year-old girl caught in the siege of Sarajevo, who describes her life without school, games and sweets; deprived of what we might recognize as the material manifestations of childhood, she questions whether she can really be a child, as a child can only be a child if he or she has a “childhood”. “Childhood” in its simplest form means nothing more than the state of being a child, but adults in modern Western society have a tendency to read more into the term, revering and romanticising childhood and often viewing it with a sense of nostalgia (James *et al.* 1998: 59). This

image of a world of innocence, joy, imagination and fantastic freedom (Goldson 1997: 1) creates a social obligation on children to be happy, often placing them in a metaphorical walled garden, a state where the child can experience freedom and pleasure, but is at the same time protected from the harsh reality of the outside world, preserving the child as innocent of adult worries. There is no one universal child or childhood for any period or place, and as children cover such a great range of ages and abilities, so material culture varies considerably between younger and older children. Therefore, as children live their lives under a variety of conditions, “different children in different circumstances may be associated with different material resources; producing ... many competing versions of childhood” (James *et al.* 1998: 168). Children represent an interesting case in terms of material culture, as although much of the material world they interact with is made deliberately, purposefully and is reflective of the culture from which it originates, the objects we most commonly associate with this group were not made or controlled directly by its members, but rather are imposed on it by another group: adults. As Schlereth has stated: “the artefacts of childhood are an especially problematical type of evidence” (1985: 12).

In spite of being integrated within the adult society in which they live, children can be considered to have a culture and material culture of their own (Sofaer 2000). That is, there are objects made by, modified by, used by and associated with children, which allow individuals within this group to be identified as a part of it through the ownership and use of them. Such artefacts become signifiers of children and childhood, and, if interpreted, should reveal aspects of the culture of this group; but these interpretations are subjective and are open to different perspectives. Indeed, it has also been suggested that the material culture of children and the material culture of childhood should be treated as distinct and separate terms (Brookshaw 2009). The main concern is that there are many objects used widely by children that could be included in what we might consider to be the material culture of children and childhood, which are not identifiable as being different from adult material culture (such as some work implements) as children occupy the same material world as adults and much material culture is interchangeable, or

has lost its association with children as a result of historical or cultural distance. For example, prior to its recent renovation, the National Trust Museum of Childhood in Sudbury, Derbyshire, exhibited general work implements and the products of industries such as lace-making and the potteries as a means of illustrating both the work children did and the fact that their material traces are often hard to distinguish from those of the adults that surround them (Roberts 2006: 281-2). It could also be argued that some items considered to be integral to childhood are instead the material culture of parenthood: items that parents feel obliged to buy for their children that the child may not necessarily want or even need. In terms of more modern material culture, further confusion is created with the paradox of the constantly changing, or even disappearing, definition of childhood, with young adults seeming ever more reluctant to grow up and take on responsibility, giving Western society the phenomenon of the “kidult” (Postman 1982; Scraton 1997). As we grow more confused over the place of children in our society, so it becomes harder to know whether material culture associated with children should belong to an increasing or decreasing number of people.

The material culture most widely associated with children is of course the toy; indeed, Schlereth (1985) has stated that toys would be expected to be the most common form of material culture related to children in museums, although it has been demonstrated that this is not always the case (Brookshaw 2009). Toys have a strong association with collections relating to children because they are the adult’s favourite form of childhood material culture and are therefore collected more often. Toys appeal to adults for a number of reasons: the human delight in miniaturization, the “cute factor”, nostalgia, the decorative value of more expensive items, and the fact that they (as lost possessions) remind the collector of a childhood they themselves have grown out of, even though those toys owned by adults may well be more delicate and valuable than any used actively by children. This is supported by research that found just 17 per cent of private toy collections are actively played with; instead such toys are mostly mementoes or art objects (Pearce 1998: 56). This association between children and toys can also be seen reflected in a visitor survey conducted in the Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood, London,

from 1984-5, when it was found that 91 per cent of the visitors questioned expected to see collections of toys and games on display before their first visit to the museum (Gardiner and Burton 1987: 163). Some 20 years after this survey, it has been found that curators estimate 59 per cent of objects chosen to represent children and childhood on display in British museums are toys and games (Roberts 2006: 203). Toys and playthings are also useful categories of objects to consider in archaeological contexts; if an object can be recognised as such, evidence of children’s behaviour in the past can be identified with a higher degree of certainty than with other types of material culture (Baxter 2005: 41).

Of particular interest are the “makeshift” toys of children’s own devising, although these are especially problematic to adults wishing to study them. Makeshift toys are designed, made, named, remodelled, used and reused solely by children; they represent the creativity and imagination of the child, and the way in which almost anything can be adapted for their amusement or entertainment. Such items – also referred to under names such as folk toys, emergent toys, homemade toys, street toys, slum dolls, playthings, or simply as kids’ toys (Schlereth 1985; Herdman 1998) – are generally made by children who do not have access to commercially manufactured toys, either through social status or the culture the child lives in. These objects may vary from being quite elaborately constructed items (such as the wonderful collection of such dolls amassed by Edward Lovett in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, most of which are now held by the Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood in London and the Edinburgh Museum of Childhood) to objects such as boxes that a child’s imagination may adapt into a wide range of different entertainments. The Lovett dolls capture the adaptability of children, who fashioned toys from whatever was to hand: items as diverse as wooden spoons, discarded boots, clothes pegs, loafahs, rags and even bones. While some of the more elaborate dolls and “characters” that Lovett collected may be easy enough for an adult to recognize as playthings, with many of the simpler items, perhaps adopted by a child for a short time or even only one game, identification (let alone collection or study) becomes difficult for those of us who have left such experiences behind. Equally, the fragility of these objects means that they rarely survi-

ve, and many collectors consider such items to be unworthy of serious consideration. However, they represent some of the few items of genuine children's material culture available to us. This makes the discovery of what appears to be a cache of children's playthings found in an early Iron Age context at Assiros Toumba, Macedonia, such a remarkable find, as it appears to be an assemblage put together and at least partially manufactured by a child or children (Wardle and Wardle 2007). For the museum curator, this ephemeral quality has worked against such items finding their way into museum collections, although there are some interesting exceptions, such as the 200 17th century street toys collected by Harborough Museum in 1988 (Mastoris 1989). Unless a museum has made a specific effort to collect these artefacts though – such as the Edith Cowan University Museum of Childhood in Australia, which collected sufficient amounts of these toys to mount an exhibition named *Homemade Treasures* (Shepherd 2001b: 8) – they will continue to be absent or few in number in museum collections.

An intriguing possibility arises with this difficulty in identifying objects associated with children, however. There are many archaeological artefacts in museum collections of unknown function; often, such material becomes labelled as “ritual”. However, miniature objects are sometimes labelled “ritual” simply because they have no obvious use. Of course, not all ritual objects are miniatures but this does raise the curious possibility that at least some of these unknown artefacts could be the material culture of past children, given that children often use objects proportional to their size. For example, two decorated miniature quernstones were found in Viking Age contexts at Lagore Crannog (Westmeath, Ireland) and were originally designated as ritual objects because their size eliminated them from being functional; it was only with later interpretation that the possibility of these objects being for children was considered (McAlister, *pers. comm.*)². Equally, the “Millie’s Camp” experiment in archaeological methodology conducted in Canada in the early 1970s illustrates the reluctance some archaeologists have of associating miniature objects with children. In this experiment, a recently abandoned Native Canadian campsite was investigated by archaeologists as if it were a prehistoric settlement, with the results compared to information given in subsequent inter-

views with the people who had used the site. One item, a miniature wooden and wire bow, was interpreted by the archaeologists as being an animal snare, but was later identified from the interviews as a child's toy (Wileman 2005: 28).

Another possible example is that of the mysterious carved stone balls found at Skara Brae Neolithic village on the Orkney Islands (MacGregor 1999; Marshall 1977), which are currently held by the National Museum of Scotland. These curious objects have been interpreted variously as weapons, bolas, parts of a weighing machine, oracles, symbols of the sun, or a means of mediating between the living and the gods (MacGregor 1999: 263; Marshall 1977: 63). Recent sensory research into carved stone balls may suggest another interpretation, however. When the balls with spikes and bosses are spun, the motion makes them appear to have more points than they actually have or as a complete sphere, depending on the design of the ball. Therefore, if they were ever spun in the past, “this would have resulted in a temporary transformation of the object into another form ... and may have been considered magical” (MacGregor 1999: 267). Given their size and properties, is it not at least possible that the Skara Brae stone balls could have been used as toys to amuse children?

Museums are, then, a unique and important resource for the archaeology of children and childhood, being both a source of material to study via the collections they hold, and a place where knowledge about children in the past can be shared through exhibitions with the public – including other archaeologists. Collections are at the heart of museums; although haphazard and subject to influences such as the survival of objects and collector bias (however unintentional), they preserve and record objects, and have the potential to share them with a wide audience. Museums work by making meanings from these objects, from their presence and absence, through the position and relationships of those objects on display. Objects can trigger whole chains of ideas and images that go far beyond their mere physical form; ideas about the antiquity, beauty, poignancy or a thousand other attributes can all be associated in strings of responses from objects on display. Objects related to children and childhood may be especially poignant or powerful in this regard, as being a child is something all visitors are either currently

experiencing or have experienced in the past, and many visitors will also have children of their own; it is a common experience that can help visitors relate to past people, societies and activities. A museum can therefore produce an intimate link between a visitor's personal memory and the collective memories triggered by the object itself, although the very placing of an object in an exhibition of course takes it out of the context for which it was intended, transforming it and creating new meanings (Risnicoff de Gorgas 2004: 356). Therefore, the ways in which such objects are presented in museums leads to (but does not fully determine) what visitors experience and learn (Jordanova 1989: 23) – and by extension, the absence of children from exhibitions perpetuates the idea that the past seems to be populated only by adults or that children were insignificant. In order that museums can be used to further understanding about children in the past, it is important to understand what is actually held by them and how those tasked with selecting, interpreting and exhibiting this theme view ideas about the importance and relevance of children to archaeology, past societies and current visitors.

3. Study design

This study investigated the material culture relating to children and childhood held in accredited mainland British museums via a series of data sets intended to examine specific large museum collections in detail and a survey of curators from across the country to produce a broader picture of what was being held by museums. The survey also provided an opportunity to test the attitudes and ideas of curators to the archaeology of children and childhood, as this would in turn affect future collection, interpretation and exhibition design. A comprehensive investigation of all museum collections in the country was beyond the scope of this study; the data collected was instead intended to produce an interesting snapshot that could be used to further consider how the archaeology of childhood operates in the museum context.

The data sets were intended as detailed examples of the range of material held, using three large museum collections from across the UK: Tyne & Wear Museums (Newcastle upon Tyne), Nottingham City Museums, and the Museum of

London, totalling 4,580 relevant records (i.e. records of objects that could be recognised as relating to children). This data was gathered in 2003 from the museum databases that record items held, whether in store or on display, with the help of the registrars at each of the institutions. The questionnaire was sent to the 325 curators in accredited British museums listed in the *Museums Yearbook*; this had first been piloted via the "Museum-L" and "Child-Mus" mailing lists (received by a large number of museum professionals internationally) (<http://home.ease.lsoft.com/archives/museum-l.html>; <https://mailman.rice.edu/mailman/listinfo/childmus>). The survey was issued via email (where an address was available) and post where this was not possible, with those curators who had not responded to the initial mailing within two months being sent a second copy to improve return rates. A total of 240 surveys were returned, giving a response rate of 74 per cent. According to Mangione (1995: 26), this equates to a "very good" response rate (where over 85% is "excellent", 60% to 70% is "acceptable", 50% to 60% is "barely acceptable" and below 50% is "not scientifically acceptable"). Respondents to the survey were asked to select from the list provided which of 15 different categories of material culture held by their museum were specifically related to children (defined here as people aged under 16, including babies and infants); to keep the data comparable, the same categories were applied to the data sets.

These material culture categories sorted the vast array of potential objects into a more manageable number of groups (A to O), which was intended to make both response and analysis easier. Unfortunately, there is no universal museum object classification index for the UK on which to base these categories, but the Social History and Industrial Classification system or SHIC (SHIC Working Party 1993) is more widely used in British museums than any other classification, name list or thesaurus (Stiff and Holm 2001), and was therefore a suitable basis for guiding the formation of these material culture categories. The categories developed were:

- (A) Toys and games (manufactured)
- (B) Toys and games (made by children/athome, i.e. "makeshift toys")
- (C) Clothing and shoes
- (D) Sports equipment

- (E) Books (including comics, children’s newspapers and magazines)
- (F) Baby items
- (G) School and education items
- (H) Punishment and discipline items
- (I) Tools and work items
- (J) Health and medical items
- (K) Religious items
- (L) Photographs
- (M) Documents
- (N) Other domestic items (such as children’s chairs and samplers)
- (O) Other (items that do not readily fit into the above categories)

4. Results from the data sets

The data gathered from the data sets revealed the following material culture (Table 1). By examining Table 1 and Figure 1, it can be seen that there is a wide variety of objects held in these museums, the most common of which is clothing (rather than toys as might be expected, although they are still a common item collected). It was unusual for these museums to collect items that might be associated with the more “negative” aspects of childhood experience such as work or discipline, and there was also comparatively few objects related to health and education, despite the obvious impacts these would have had on children’s lives in the past –and arguably more impact than any toy has achieved.

In the few previous studies that have considered the issue of childhood objects in museums (Schlereth 1985, Shepherd 1996), only those artefacts from social history collections were considered, although this is hardly surprising given that this is almost exclusively the sort of material that is exhibited in museums when the subject of “childhood” is raised. Material such as manufactured toys, clothing, photographs, baby feeding bottles, etc. would indeed be classified as social history items by museums, but not all items recorded in the Tyne & Wear Museums, Nottingham City Museums or Museum of London data sets were from social history collections. In the process of data collection, records for all collections (i.e. not just social history) were searched in all three of these cases, and some archaeological objects were found (Table 2). Although these figures seem

Category	Frequency	Percent
A – Toys & games	524	11.5
B – Makeshift toys	42	0.9
C – Clothing & shoes	1484	32.4
D – Sports equipment	3	0.1
E – Books & comics	574	12.5
F – Baby items	783	17.1
G – Education	25	0.6
H – Discipline	0	0
I – Work items	0	0
J – Health & medical	11	0.2
K – Religion	1	0
L – Photographs	748	16.3
M – Documents	23	0.5
N – Other Domestic	93	2.0
O – Other	269	5.9
Total	4580	100%

Table 1.- Distribution of objects in all data sets by material culture category.

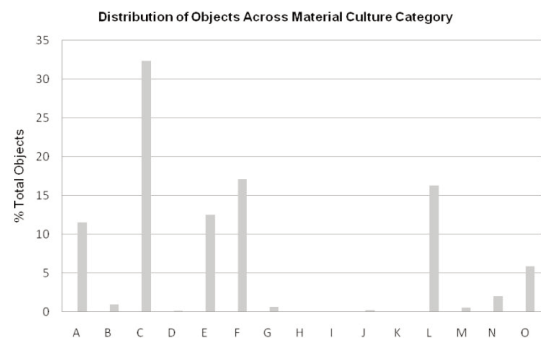


Figure 1.- Graph to show distribution of objects by material culture category in the data sets.

rather insignificant when seen within collections of this size – the archaeological objects represented 3.2% of the data as a whole, or 1.2%, 0.2% and 10.9% of the individual collections respectively – it nevertheless demonstrates that items relating to children and childhood do exist and can be identified in archaeological museum collections.

Taking this idea further, the investigation of the data sets allowed information on the date of objects to be collected in most cases. Table 4 illustrates the distribution of objects in the three data sets by date,

	Tyne & Wear Museum	Nottingham city Museum	Museum of London	Total
Arch. objects	13	5	128	146
Total in data set	1086	2317	1177	4580

Table 2.- Frequencies of archaeology objects in each data set.

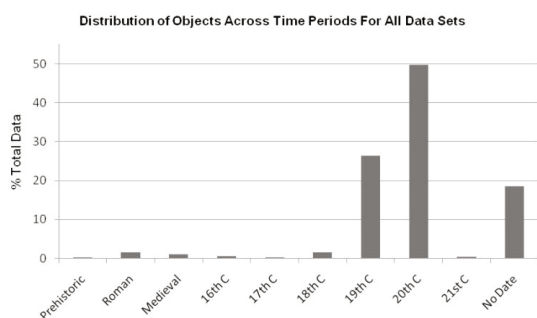


Figure 2.- Chart to show distribution of objects by date for all data sets combined.

Period	Total Frequency	Total Percent
Prehistoric	2	0.1
Roman	71	1.5
Medieval	46	1.0
16th Century	22	0.5
17th Century	12	0.3
18th Century	70	1.5
19th Century	1208	26.4
20th Century	2276	49.7
21st Century	20	0.4
No Date	853	18.6
Total	4580	100%

Table 3.- Distribution of objects by date for all three data sets combined.

where “prehistoric” refers to any time prior to the Roman invasion of Britain; “Roman” to the time of occupation; “Medieval” to the period between the fifth and the fifteenth centuries, and “no date” to those records for which no date has been recorded (or where it cannot be clearly classified, e.g. “post medieval”). All archaeological material was assu-

med to be British unless labelled otherwise, thus it was considered appropriate to use such a standard UK classification for the date analysis of the material. One item – a mummy of a child in the Nottingham City Museums data set – was clearly not British and most likely Egyptian in origin; this was placed in the “prehistoric” section for the purposes of this analysis. While the majority of items in the three data sets did have dates attributed to them in the museum records, a small number did not. This should not be a problem for this analysis, although it is unfortunate that the majority of these records came from a single case study (Nottingham City Museums). However, most of those records with missing dates in the Nottingham data set were books, so it would be reasonable to assume that they fall into the nineteenth and twentieth century categories. There were also quite a number of dates missing from the Museum of London data; some were photos (so again can be attributed to the nineteenth or twentieth centuries) but unfortunately there was also a lot of undated archaeological material.

This analysis not only illustrates the existence of material in the deeper past that can be identified as relating to children, but also demonstrates the distributions of artefacts across various historical periods. Not surprisingly, it was the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that yielded the greatest amount of material culture (26.4% and 49.7% of the total data respectively); there was likely to be a greater amount of artefacts that could be readily associated with children from this time, with the growth of the consumer society. Specialised toy shops selling goods aimed specifically at children and children’s books first appeared in the UK in the late eighteenth century (Cunningham 1995: 72), and this trend continued into the nineteenth century, with children increasingly gaining a role as consumers during the first half of the twentieth century (*ibid*: 177). More recent material is also more likely to have survived. There was very little from the current century (just twenty items overall, representing just 0.4% of the total material), although given that it is only nine years old, this is unsurprising. Of the pre-1800 material, it seems mostly to originate from the Roman period (71 objects) and the eighteenth century (70 objects), with little coming from the other periods at all. This is most likely to be because both Tyne & Wear Museums and the Museum of London have

Period	Tyne & Wear Frequency	Tyne & Wear Percent	Nott. city Frequency	Nott. city Percent	London Frequency	London Percent
Prehistoric	0	0	2	0.1	0	0
Roman	9	0.8	2	0.1	60	5.1
Medieval	3	0.3	1	0	42	3.6
16th Century	3	0.3	2	0.1	17	1.4
17th Century	2	0.2	2	0.1	8	0.7
18th Century	9	0.8	39	1.7	22	1.9
19th Century	254	23.4	602	26.0	352	29.9
20th Century	661	60.8	1156	49.9	459	39.0
21st Century	6	0.6	1	0	13	1.1
No Date	139	12.8	510	22.0	204	17.3
Total	1086	100%	2317	100%	1177	100%

Table 4.- Distribution of objects by date in the data sets.

archaeological collections that focus on the Roman period, and the relative recentness of the eighteenth century. The distribution of objects by individual museum is shown in Table 4 and figure 3.

This data suggests that children do appear to be accessible in a material sense beyond the past two hundred years (a general time span used in relation to social history, particularly with children, where the Victorian schoolrooms and Edwardian nurseries are especially popular – Fleming 1989), albeit to a somewhat limited extent. If 1800 is taken as the cut-off point for social history collections, it can be seen that there is a small proportion of items that pre-dates this. In the Tyne & Wear example this amounted to twenty-six artefacts (2.4% of the data set), in the Nottingham City Museums example the figure was forty-eight artefacts (2.1%) and in the Museum of London data set 149 artefacts (12.7%). With pre-1800 objects comprising such a small proportion of these museum collections (223 items in total or 4.9% of the overall data), it is easy to see just why there has been an emphasis on recent social history items. However, these figures also illustrated that there were items that could be identified as relating to children from deeper in the past. This means both that museums have access to objects relating to the archaeology of children and childhood that could potentially be used in displays, and that archaeologists could use such material as a possible resource for researching children in the past.

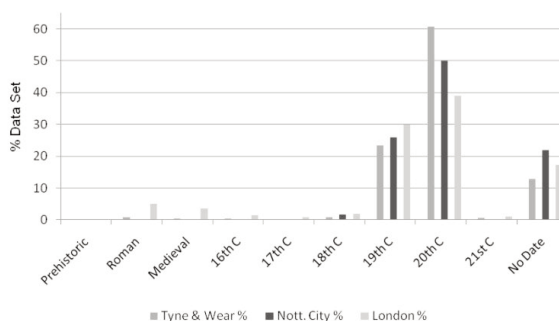


Figure 3.- Chart to show distribution of objects by date, sorted by data set.

5. Results from the survey

To get a broader picture of the material culture relating to children and childhood than the data sets could allow, the survey asked respondents to select which categories of material culture their museum held that related to children. Of the 240 respondents to the survey, 227 thought that there was some material culture in their museum relating to children and childhood. As respondents could select as many categories as appropriate, the percentage columns do not add up to 100%. The results were as shows in Table 5.

Table 5 and figure 4 illustrate that the respondents rated clothes and toys as the most common forms of material culture relating to children in their museums, with virtually no difference between the occurrences of these two groups of items. As

Category	Yes Frequency	Yes Percent	No Frequency	No Percent
A – Toys & games	199	87.7	28	12.3
B – Makeshift toys	102	44.9	125	55.1
C – Clothing & shoes	195	85.9	32	14.1
D – Sports equipment	89	39.2	138	60.8
E – Books & comics	157	69.2	70	30.8
F – Baby items	168	74.0	59	26.0
G – Education	192	84.6	35	15.4
H – Discipline	74	32.6	153	67.4
I – Work items	69	30.4	158	69.6
J – Health & medical	84	37.0	143	63.0
K – Religion	90	39.6	137	60.4
L – Photographs	169	74.4	58	25.6
M – Documents	105	46.3	122	53.7
N – Other domestic	60	26.4	167	73.6
O – Other	22	9.7	205	90.3

Table 5.- The categories any collected material falls into, according to survey respondents.

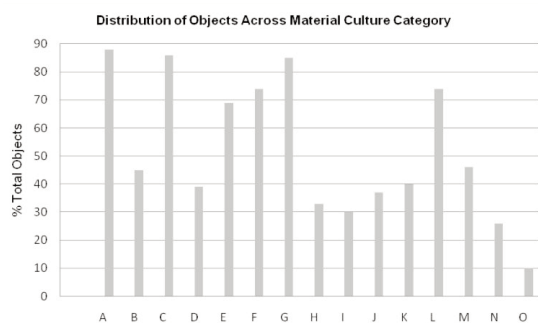


Figure 4.- Chart to show responses to survey question.

Specialism	Frequency	Percent
Archaeology	44	18.3
Social History	63	26.2
Industrial History	15	6.3
Childhood	3	1.3
Anthropology	10	4.2
General	105	43.7
Total	240	100

Table 6.- Responses to survey question on specialism.

with the data sets, there were low levels of items related to work, discipline, sports and health, but a major difference here is the amount of education items reported in the survey when compared to the data sets, suggesting either the respondents over-estimating the amount of educational items they had in their collections or that the data set collections were unusually lacking in these items. Moving on from asking about objects held by the respondents' museums, the survey also investigated the attitudes and ideas of curators in relation to collecting and using archaeological items that connect with children in the past. To begin, the survey asked the respondents to report their professional subject specialism, to allow a comparison of results between archaeologists and other groups (Table 6).

It can be seen that the majority of respondents (43.7%) were curators of general collections, although quite large numbers of archaeology (18.3%) curators also returned the survey. The survey also asked the responding curators for their attitudes to the subject of childhood culture in museums. Attitude scales are measuring instruments designed to divide people roughly into a broad number of groups in relation to each other with respect to a particular attitude, and to allow

that attitude to be related to other variables in the survey; they are not intended to measure absolutely or reveal subtle insights into individual cases (Oppenheim 1992: 187). While designing attitude scales can be problematical, good indications of a meaningful scale are low levels of respondents wanting to add to or change the scale to reflect their attitudes, and few respondents giving “unknown” answers or skipping the question altogether during the pilot stage (Oppenheim 1992: 179). The pilot study revealed no additions or modifications to be requested in any of the attitude questions, and these questions had very low levels of “unknowns” or “no answer given” responses in both the pilot and actual survey, suggesting the respondents’ views were well represented by the scales offered. When asked about how important they considered the roles and activities of children in the past to be, the results were as follows, showing both total responses and just those given by archaeologists (Table 7).

Table 7 shows clearly that the majority of responding curators answered “very important” or “important” (81.2% overall or 84.1% for the archaeology group alone), with the most common answer being “important” (with 44.5% of all respondents or 47.7% of archaeologists). Only one curator thought children to be “unimportant, irrelevant or inaccessible” and none to be “very unimportant”. With a question such as this, there was always the problem of the respondent giving an “acceptable” answer rather than their own thoughts (i.e. with current emphasis on social inclusion, curators may feel that they “have to” consider minority groups important), and of variations between how individuals rate the attributes along the scale provided because of factors such as acquiescence, a tendency amongst some respondents to assent rather than dissent (Oppenheim 1992: 181). Indeed, one archaeology respondent noted that children should not automatically be included in displays if there is insufficient evidence for their presence, as such generic displays would be “at best a highly simplistic and distorted view of the past and at worst no more than political tools to put over some modern agenda”. Taking this into consideration, there still does seem to be a general consensus that children were important, though. This was supported by comments such as “we all are or were children” (six respondents) and “children are a major proportion of the community as a

Response	Frequency	Percent	Arch. Freq.	Arch. Percent
Very Important	88	36.7	16	36.4
Important	107	44.5	21	47.7
Fairly Important	36	15.0	5	11.4
Unimportant, Irrelevant or Inaccessible	1	0.4	0	0
Very Unimportant, Irrelevant or Inaccessible	0	0	0	0
Unknown	3	1.3	2	4.5
No Answer Given	5	2.1	0	0
Total	240	100	44	100

Table 7.- Responses to survey question on importance of children.

whole...you cannot achieve a balanced interpretation of past times without specific reference to children/childhood” from a curator in a small archaeology museum. This may indicate that archaeology curators would indeed be inclined to display material relating to children if it could be identified and was available in their collections (perhaps suggesting a change in attitudes since the Hambleton Villa material was curated).

The next survey question asked for the curators’ opinion on the relevance of children to the subject matter their museum displays. This question was asked to get an idea of where curators think the theme of children and childhood should be displayed in museums, with the answers again expressed using an attitude scale. From Table 8, it is clear that by far the greatest number of people chose the answer “relevant” (43% of overall responses, and 34% of archaeologists). In this question, far fewer curators selected the “very” option than they had in the importance question, and more opted for the “fairly” and “negative” options. This indicates that while the majority of curators seem to see the potential importance of children, less find children to be relevant to their own particular museum. One

Response	Freq.	Percent	Arch. Freq.	Arch. Percent
Very Relevant	46	19.2	7	15.9
Relevant	103	42.8	15	34.1
Fairly Relevant	70	29.2	13	29.5
Irrelevant	9	3.7	5	11.4
Very Irrelevant	3	1.3	1	2.3
Unknown	3	1.3	3	6.8
No Answer Given	6	2.5	0	0
Total	240	100	44	100

Table 8.- Responses to survey question on relevance of children.

Response	Freq.	Percent	Arch. Freq.	Arch. Percent
Very Interesting to Visitors	100	41.7	16	36.4
Interesting to Visitors	100	41.7	19	43.2
Fairly Interesting to Visitors	25	10.3	3	6.8
Uninteresting to Visitors	0	0	0	0
Very Uninteresting to Visitors	0	0	0	0
Impossible to Mount	10	4.2	6	13.6
Unknown	2	0.8	0	0
No Answer Given	3	1.3	0	0
Total	240	100	44	100

Table 9.- Responses to survey question on visitor interest.

especially revealing comment left by an archaeology curator from a large, mixed museum noted that there could be a problem of giving “more prominence [to children] than the material justifies because of modern [political] agendas”. The responses for curators overall and archaeologists were as shows in Table 9.

The survey then concerned potential public interest in displays about children and childhood from the curator’s perspective. It was considered important to assess how the curators rated public interest – rather than asking visitors directly, for example by conducting surveys at museums – as such expectations of visitor interest could influence future exhibition decisions. There are problems involved with asking survey respondents to rate their own opinions along a scale (Oppenheim 1992: 205-6); when they are asked to rate another group’s responses, this can obviously be seen to be subject to further errors. However, as this question seeks perceptions by curators and not an objective view of visitor interest, this is acceptable – although it would be a good issue for future research to expand on by examining the visitor’s point of view.

The data from this question shows that overwhelmingly, curators thought that visitors would be interested or very interested in a display about the theme of children/childhood in relation to the material they display in their museum (83.4% of respondents or 79.6% of archaeologists). In addition to this, not a single curator selected the “uninteresting” or “very uninteresting” options. This was a very positive response indeed; if the curators who answered the survey gauged public attitudes anywhere near correctly, it does point towards the public being interested in displays of children and childhood in museums. From the comments and explanations left by respondents, it appears that this interest stems particularly from two major groups of museum visitors – school parties and families. Respondents were then asked whether it was generally feasible to mount displays about or including this theme in archaeology museums. Table 10 again shows results for all curators and then for archaeologists.

The responses to this question seem to suggest that curators think it is possible to mount exhibits on the archaeology of childhood, but comments left on the surveys suggest reasons why this isn’t often done: factors such as lack of collections in

Response	YES Freq.	Yes Percent	Arch. Freq.	Arch. Percent
Yes	114	47.5	19	43.2
No	6	2.5	0	0
Some	83	34.6	21	47.7
Undecided	19	7.9	1	2.3
No Answer Given	18	7.5	3	6.8
Total	240	100	44	100

Table 10.- Responses to survey question on displaying the archaeology of children/ childhood.

individual museums, lack of information and lack of resources may restrict such efforts. A small number of respondents also seemed to see children in the past as inaccessible or as a topic that it wasn't appropriate for archaeology to approach. A number of additional reasons were suggested by curators, including one from a respondent at a large archaeology museum: "as I went through your questionnaire, I realised that throughout the museum there are large numbers of objects connected with children and childhood, but I doubt if anyone other than our Education Officer has given this much thought", which again highlights the importance of the views, opinions and ideas of museum curators. Interestingly, however, two of the curators did respond by saying that they didn't think that children were under-represented at all.

6. Discussion

At the core of a lot of the discussions on the archaeology of childhood in museums is the material culture of children and childhood, which stands out as being an area that would benefit from further research. In particular, more work needs to be undertaken to develop this area in museums: how such objects relate to children and childhood, how they are collected, and how they are utilized in displays. Jordanova (1989: 27) states that more work is also needed to fully understand how objects are invested with significance about the rich and contradictory meanings of childhood to "illuminate the link between knowledge and the museum experience by helping us to answer questions such as: How could we see childhood in these

objects? By what mechanisms could they evoke memories?" While it is reasonable to assume that visitors do see something in childhood objects that goes beyond the mere physical form, it is simply not valid to assume that this is the same for all people, regardless of age, class, culture or gender. At present, we still do not fully understand how this something more is perceived in objects and how it varies according to audience; this is certainly an area where future research would be welcomed.

Theoretically, archaeology has the potential to advance discussions on the material culture of children; there has been an increasing drive to include and identify children in the material record, and to see the archaeology of childhood as a full and valid research interest. While the work published thus far has been almost exclusively directed at archaeologists working in the field – especially in mortuary analysis (e.g. Allen 1995; Crawford 1999) and identifying the work of children as apprentices (such as Finlay 1997, Grimm 2000, Kamp *et al.* 1999) – much of the theory could in principal be applied in a museum context. For example, Lillehammer's (1989) concept of "the child's world" stresses the importance of recognising children as creators of their own world, producers of their own material culture and active agents within society. If curators were to adopt such a concept, it could encourage a broader range of material evidence in displays, challenging the Edwardian Nursery image of museums of childhood that still prevails. As Baxter (2005: 115) notes, "emphasising the relationships children have with the world around them, both natural and cultural, and acknowledging the diverse contributions children can and do make in different cultural settings means that the archaeology of childhood is not a discrete specialisation...as more archaeologists embrace a research perspective that recognises childhood as a critical vantage point for understanding the archaeological record, all archaeology will become the archaeology of childhood".

The implication of the data presented here is that at least some material evidence of children does exist and can be identified in British museum collections, including objects from the deeper past and amongst items recorded as specifically part of archaeological collections. Therefore, including archaeological evidence in exhibitions about children/childhood – and including children and childhood in exhibitions about archaeology – is not only

theoretically possible (depending on the condition of the material culture) but is also something to be encouraged. Exhibitions such as “Archaeologies of Childhood: The first years of life in Roman Egypt” that was shown at the Kelsey Museum at the University of Michigan in 2003/04 (SHCY 2004) shows that it is not entirely impossible to do this.

However, it must be highlighted that some of the objects found in the data sets were bones; the remains of the children themselves rather than the objects they used. Using these items in museums could be interpreted as a morbid and inappropriate way of including children in exhibitions, and may cause some ethical debates to surface which could discourage curators from going down this route. This does not necessarily have to be the case, though. The display of a child skeleton nicknamed “Charlie” at the Alexander Keiller Museum in Avebury, Wiltshire, demonstrated that child remains can be exhibited in archaeological museums without causing controversy – indeed they can even have positive benefits. In a study gauging the public perception of archaeological museums, Griggs and Hays-Jackson (1983) found that the general public widely associated archaeology museums with education and needing background knowledge before visiting, and considered them particularly unsuitable for children (Merriman 2000: 101). The remains of “Charlie”, a prehistoric child aged around four years found in a ditch at Windmill Hill, was considered by staff to be the most popular display in the museum because s/he “acted as an emotional handle to help bridge the gap of 5,000 years between the builders of the monument and the modern museum visitor” (Stone 1994: 200). Charlie helped turn the past from something in textbooks to something that really happened – especially for children. This finding was reiterated in the results of an unpublished survey conducted by the museum’s curator – provided in response to the survey of curators – who found that visitor opinions were strongly in favour of retaining the skeleton on display, with the interest of children in a child from the past being repeatedly cited as justification (Cleal, *pers. comm.*)³.

The benefits of including children in exhibitions go beyond the positive responses to Charlie, and were also mentioned by some of the comments from the survey in this study: one respondent working in a local archaeology museum highlighted that, “it is really interesting to school parties, chil-

dren relate to items that concern childhood [in the past]”, while another archaeologist from a city museum added “audiences are often particularly interested in displays which they find meaningful and relevant in terms of their own experiences in life”. In regard to schoolchildren, a significant group of museum visitors, the UK National Curriculum for history at Key Stages 1 and 2 (ages five to eleven) does encourage using children and toys in the past as a means of studying how lives have changed over time (Department for Education and Skills 2005), as children can relate better to other children than they can to adults. Families can also find meaning and relevance in seeing children (and by extension families) in displays. Interestingly, however, a discussion with staff at the Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood produced an entirely different response. Here it was suggested that including the archaeology of childhood would be counter-productive, as many visitors, particularly children, have poor conceptualisation about large spans of time and would therefore not connect with such displays. This is an interesting disparity, and is perhaps an area that warrants further investigation.

Another interesting example where the archaeology of children and childhood has been used in a museum context was the touring special exhibition *Buried Treasure*, assembled by the British Museum, and which visited the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff, the Manchester Museum, the Hancock Museum in Newcastle upon Tyne, and Norwich Castle Museum between November 2003 and January 2006. An inclusion in this exhibition was an installation entitled *Toys Were Us*, a selection of toys dating to between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries, which had been found preserved in the thick mud flanking the River Thames in London as a result of both conventional archaeological investigation and amateur metal detector work. These items, made mostly of pewter, had survived in the anaerobic conditions of the mud in remarkable condition; they consisted of household miniatures such as jugs, cooking pots and furniture (presumed to be part of doll houses), toy guns and cannons (some of which could have been fired) and male and female figures dressed in the latest fashions. These objects are a fascinating window on the lives of children, and also have wider implications – many of the full sized versions of these objects have not survived in the material

record, and because the miniatures were modelled directly on them, they stand as vital social and historical documents in their own right (Hobbs 2003: 120). Interestingly, this makes a rare example where the material culture of children has been used to make inferences about the adult world rather than vice versa. Such objects were also a revelation in understanding medieval children's experience: "for many years, social historians thought that this [the Middle Ages] was a time of little enjoyment for children, particularly in terms of toys...Relatively recent discoveries in London completely reversed this view and demonstrated once again how new discoveries...can completely change our perception of the past" (Hobbs 2003: 118). Therefore, this material culture was not just important historically, but also involved children seamlessly in the exhibition as a whole, as active social agents; children were not portrayed as a group socially included for just political motivations.

From the survey, further points about the relationship between archaeology and the theme of children/childhood in museums can be extracted. The first of these asked about perceived importance of the role of children in the past. The response of the archaeology curators was given as 36% "very important", 48% "important", 11% "fairly important", and 5% "unknown". This may indicate, then, that archaeology curators would be inclined to display and interpret material relating to children if it could be identified and was available in their collections. However, when these figures are contrasted with the results of the next question, it can be seen that this group does not appear to regard the theme of children as relevant to their own particular museum: only 16% selected "very relevant", 34% "relevant" and 30% "fairly relevant". This suggests that although the archaeologists perceived children as theoretically (or politically) important, many of the curators had difficulty in applying such ideas to the specific material their individual museums housed. This disparity may be due to problems in identifying material culture as evidencing the presence or activities of children – or at least, the problems of re-interpreting material in this light – and perhaps could also be related to the individual themes the museums display (for instance, a museum interpreting the Roman army would justifiably be unconcerned with children). Another reason may be linked with expectations of what visitors to museums want.

When the issue of perceived visitor interest was put to the respondents, a rather negative response came from the archaeology group compared to the group as a whole. While 36% of the archaeologists responded "very interesting" and 43% "interesting", 14% selected the "impossible to mount" option. Therefore, not only did the archaeologists consider that visitors to their museums would be less interested in such a display than those curators working in other areas did, there was also the issue of whether a display would be practically possible to mount in the first place. These expectations and the issue of whether a display would be feasible in many museums do go a long way towards explaining the comments received about why displays have been so rarely done thus far: a display about children/childhood would indeed not be relevant to a museum if it could not be created with the available resources or would not be expected to draw in visitors. This data suggests that there may be some serious problems in introducing archaeology into the interpretation of this theme in museums, particularly in a material sense, although this will not be the case in every museum.

The survey demonstrated that while the archaeologists may consider children in the past to be important (always assuming there isn't an issue of respondents giving a politically acceptable answer rather than their true thoughts), the practical application of this interest within museum archaeology is not always feasible except in exceptional circumstances (such as the *Buried Treasure* example discussed above). This question of feasibility appears due to the problems surrounding identifying material culture, although a paucity of information and an apparent reluctance on the behalf of some archaeological curators to apply such issues to their own museum may also account for it. However, a lack of material evidence does not always have to stand as a barrier to inclusion if curators are willing to try alternate approaches. For example, the aims of the redesign of the Prehistoric Gallery in the Museum of London in the 1990s included "showing viable and fully functioning societies...women, children and older people as well as men...and those under-represented groups in positive and active roles" (Wood 1996: 59). Children in this case were represented through models and reconstruction drawings that were designed to balance gender and age, rather than through material culture alone.

During the course of this study, this issue was discussed with a number of curators in a variety of museums. Some tentatively suggested that a display about children and childhood in an archaeological context might be possible, but collaboration (mentioned specifically by two curators and indirectly by a further two) between museums would be necessary to collate sufficient material culture. Other curators were already positively enthusiastic about the use of archaeology: the two who fell into this category were both, curiously, curators of temporary exhibitions. In Derby, the curator of an exhibition about children and childhood in the local area had taken the opportunity to consult with an archaeological specialist elsewhere in the museums service to provide a fuller answer to this question; the consensus was that such a display was theoretically possible, although the material culture would have to be supplemented with techniques such as audio-visual display, graphics and reproductions. The most enthusiastic was at Pontypool, South Wales, where it was indicated that many museums hold relevant material culture in archaeological collections but choose not to exhibit it, citing the example of Tenby Museum (Pembrokeshire), where a considerable amount of Roman and Etruscan material – including many objects identifiable as belonging to children – is held in storage but has never been displayed, largely because in such a location it wouldn't be expected by visitors. As the curator noted, "there are all sorts of things all over the place, but they don't always get on display because they are not pertaining to the displays that people want".

Sofaer (1999: 7) has commented that, "in museum settings, children are active as visitors through their participation in educational and fun activities, but are often missing from archaeological displays and dioramas, especially in interpretations of pre- or proto-history...the message is that children do not make history, they just learn it! This reinforces the perceived 'place' of children in

modern society as passive and socially insignificant". Since this comment was made, the archaeology of children and childhood has continued to develop as a field, and there has been a small but growing interest in museums to take note of children as more than just visitors. At the beginning of this study, it was considered that archaeology had potential to contribute to the collection and display of the theme of children/childhood in museums outside of mainstream social history. This research has shown that indeed some potential does exist: the literature on the archaeology of children is increasingly expanding and developing; there are many curators who seem interested and enthusiastic about bringing archaeology to bear in including children in museums, despite the attendant difficulties of it; evidence has been found for identifiable archaeological material culture relating to children in museum collections, and examples have been established where this has been successfully done. The data presented here has shown that there is a wide variety of objects held in British museums that relate to children, and not all of these objects are from recent social history collections as might be expected. Objects do exist from the deeper past in museum collections that can be associated with children, and archaeology curators do seem to be receptive to interpreting and exhibiting such materials when resources permit, although such exhibitions may only be reasonable as small installations of material alongside more recent historical objects or as a result of multi-museum collaboration. It has been said that, "children are hot property in today's museums" (Shepherd 2001b: 1); this is certainly the case in terms of seeing children as passive participants in school and family visits, but if the observations about children relating well to other children in exhibitions are true, then there is huge benefit to including the archaeology of childhood in museums more often, for archaeologists, for museums, and for children themselves.

NOTES

1. Dr. Rebecca Gowland, Archaeologist, Cambridge University. *Childhood and the Life Course in Archaeology*, speaking at The Archaeology of Infancy and Childhood Conference, University of Kent, 7th May 2005.
2. Deirdre K. McAlister, National University of Ireland Maynooth. *Accessing Childhood(s) in Early Medieval and Medieval Ireland*, speaking at The Archaeology of Infancy and Childhood Conference, University of Kent, 7th May 2005.
3. Rosamund Cleal, Curator, Alexander Keiller Museum, April 2003.

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