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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*

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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**

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Public interest in the Hoard created long queues outside the Potteries Museum when it was first displayed. ©  
Photo by Smith Davis Press; reproduced by permission of Stoke-on-Trent City Council  
119x56mm (300 x 300 DPI)

Review Only



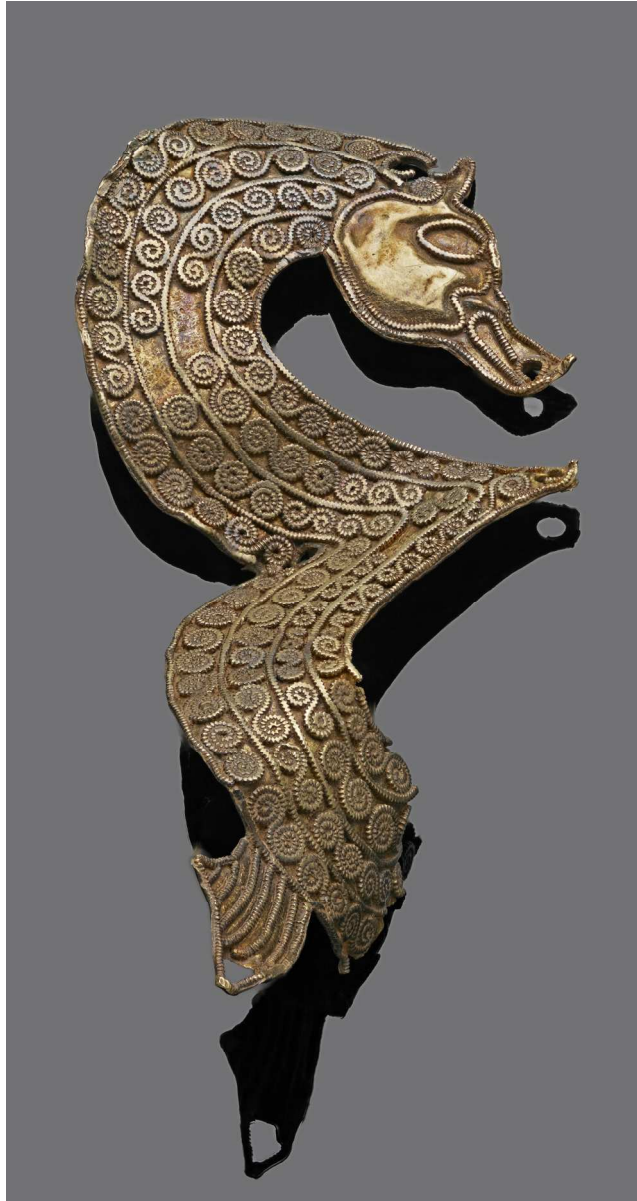
Could an aged silver pommel (StH 711), probably made on the Continent, represent elite identity claims among the Angles or Saxons? Length: 48.1mm. © Birmingham Museums Trust.  
77x51mm (300 x 300 DPI)

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

View Only



Gold mount (StH 1497) popularly known as the 'seahorse'. Length: 41.1mm. © Birmingham Museums Trust  
117x218mm (300 x 300 DPI)

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3                   **Ancient objects with modern meanings:**  
4                   **museums, volunteers, and the Anglo-Saxon ‘Staffordshire Hoard’**  
5                   **as a marker of 21<sup>st</sup>-century regional identity**  
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11           **Abstract:** The Staffordshire Hoard is the largest Anglo-Saxon gold hoard ever found. On  
12 display from soon after its discovery in 2009 during fundraising to secure it for the region,  
13 the Hoard has become a source of local pride in Staffordshire, receiving over a million  
14 visitors. This article explores the Hoard as a marker of identity, both in the past and in the  
15 present and evaluates how the ‘treasure process’, museums and museum volunteers are  
16 shaping public identification with the Anglo-Saxon past of the Mercian kingdom. Drawing on  
17 focus group data, we argue that aspects of the naming and display of the Hoard have  
18 encouraged its inclusion in existing narratives of belonging and ‘authenticity’ in  
19 Staffordshire. Such archaeological discoveries have the potential to provide points of  
20 continuity between the post-industrial present and the distant past, and stimulate a  
21 reconsideration of the present status of the region in contemporary cultural and political  
22 discourse.  
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32           **Keywords:** Staffordshire Hoard; material culture; Anglo-Saxon Archaeology; regional  
33 identity; museum volunteers; heritage.  
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3 **Ancient objects with modern meanings:**  
4 **museums, volunteers, and the Anglo-Saxon ‘Staffordshire Hoard’**  
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6 **as a marker of 21<sup>st</sup>-century regional identity**  
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11 In 2009 a large hoard of Anglo-Saxon gold was uncovered in Staffordshire.<sup>1</sup> More than 5kg  
12 of gold and 1.5kg of silver metalwork, worked into fittings for weapons, war-gear and  
13 religious objects, had been buried in the mid-7<sup>th</sup> century AD when that part of Britain was  
14 ruled by the kings of Anglo-Saxon Mercia. The Hoard is one of the highest profile  
15 archaeological finds of its type for a generation in England. It has also highlighted the  
16 increasing impact of ‘portable antiquities’ (a class of artefact discovered outside  
17 archaeological excavation and reported through the Portable Antiquities Scheme) on public  
18 interest in the distant past.<sup>2</sup> In the first five years after its discovery, the Staffordshire Hoard  
19 was seen by over a million people but its meanings for the study of the Anglo-Saxon past are  
20 just beginning to be uncovered. This paper considers how the discovery of Anglo-Saxon  
21 objects intersects with questions of 21<sup>st</sup>-century local identity and regional pride in  
22 Staffordshire, a Midland county better known for its recent agricultural and industrial  
23 heritage. It evaluates the role of the ‘treasure process’, museums, and museum volunteers in  
24 mediating that interaction and shaping new forms of public identification with the past.  
25 Interaction with newly rediscovered relics from the past can stimulate discussion of the  
26 ‘forgetting’ of post-industrial regions in modern Britain, a process that is reflected in wider  
27 political trends of distrust of the metropolis and in calls for greater regional autonomy. We  
28 show how dramatic archaeological discoveries that demand a reconceptualization of past  
29 regional identities can prompt public reflection on regional identity in the present.  
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45 **Archaeology, objects, and identity**

46 The archaeological record has often been shaped by a search for a ‘usable past’ to recreate,  
47 legitimate, or disrupt modern understandings, sensibilities, and allegiances. The impact of  
48 archaeological finds on modern, contemporary identities was given new urgency by the  
49 resurgence of nationalist agendas in Europe during the 1990s (Díaz-Andreu and Champion  
50 1996). Archaeological collections have also been the source of post-colonial claims by  
51 indigenous groups struggling for possession of land and influence over the interpretation of  
52 their material heritage (Watkins 2006). Embedded nationalist narratives have at times  
53 prioritised particular archaeological agendas, for example in the preference for ‘Celtic’ over  
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3 'Viking' narratives in the archaeology of Ireland (Wallace 2008). Equally, cherished  
4 narratives of national pasts have proved difficult for new archaeological research to dislodge,  
5 as shown by James (1999) of the Atlantic Celts. For the nation as an 'imagined community',  
6 archaeological discoveries often become powerful talismans of national cultural narratives.  
7  
8 Early medieval examples of this phenomenon include the Ardagh chalice in Ireland or Viking  
9 ships from Roskilde in Denmark, their power deriving from public perception that their  
10 'antiquity and uniqueness' embodies the spirit of a nation (Smith 2001, 447).  
11  
12 Museums, as both repositories and displays of archaeological artefacts, are arenas in which  
13 national identities can be constructed and negotiated (McLean 1998). It has been argued that  
14 in museums the past is being continually recreated in the present, and that 'we create the  
15 heritage we require' (Urry, 1996; Ashworth and Graham 2005, 5). The impact of Anglo-  
16 Saxon collections on communities within England has been harder to establish, however,  
17 perhaps because of mainstream uncertainty about the role of 'Englishness' and 'English  
18 heritage' within a contemporary British context. Such uncertainty can be traced back to the  
19 19<sup>th</sup> century, when prominent Anglo-Saxon artefacts such as the Kingston Down brooch  
20 failed to find homes in so-called 'national' collections' whose keepers argued that such  
21 artefacts were more properly housed in 'provincial' museums (McCombe 2011, 154-7). The  
22 meaning of the Anglo-Saxon past and the contested nature of 'English' cultural identity are  
23 still beset by contested historical and biological claims, made especially by far right groups:  
24 thus, the display of 'Englishness' and the relevance of the English past have become difficult  
25 topics for museums whose collections focus on such material (Smith 2012, 54-5).  
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38 Regional identity, by contrast, is acknowledged as a potential tourist commodity,  
39 focusing on 'authentic' aspects of regional heritage, such as an historic Viking presence  
40 (Halewood and Hannam 2001), ancient landscapes, or regional traditions such as food  
41 products (Simon 2005). Collections in regional museums are likewise seen as important for  
42 community identity, which has sometimes encouraged calls for the restitution of important  
43 cultural items, for example, the campaign to rehouse the Lindisfarne Gospels from London's  
44 British Library to North-East England (Davis 1999). Such calls may be prompted by  
45 economic factors but also draw on affective associations of certain items with specific 'place-  
46 identities'. Local feeling over the fate of material heritage may be particularly powerful if  
47 there is a sense that a locality has been overlooked within the nation at the expense of the  
48 'metropolis', as Dicks suggested of industrial heritage in the Rhondda Valley and Jones  
49 found in exchanges between a Highlands community and the National Museum of Scotland  
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3 in Edinburgh over the early medieval Pictish Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab (Dicks, 2000;  
4 Jones, 2004).

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6 Reaction to the Staffordshire Hoard's discovery and subsequent display in the  
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8 Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, therefore should be understood in the context of male and  
9  
10 female working-class identities in the Midlands. Stoke-on-Trent, the largest city in  
11  
12 Staffordshire, has been physically defined by and is regularly named for its pottery industry  
13  
14 which employed many local men and women (Briggs 1993). Local novelist Arnold Bennett  
15  
16 celebrated this industrial landscape as '... absurdly, ridiculously, splendidly English', in  
17  
18 contrast to more usual depictions of rural Englishness (Johnson 1993). Recently, however,  
19  
20 Stoke-on-Trent and its environs have been characterised by post-industrial decline. In 2010,  
21  
22 Stoke-on-Trent was ranked as the 3rd most deprived local authority in the West Midlands  
23  
24 (out of 30) and the 9th most deprived Unitary/Metropolitan authority area in England (from  
25  
26 92) (City of Stoke-on-Trent 2011). This dialectic between a past characterised by skilled  
27  
28 working-class employment and deprivation in the post-industrial present is evident in how  
29  
30 identities are currently negotiated in the Potteries. Johnson (1993) has suggested that the  
31  
32 heritage of the pottery industry is reflected in local interest in craftwork skills. However,  
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34 some have suggested that the shadow of the pottery industry has hampered efforts at  
35  
36 regeneration, a situation exacerbated by the geographical make-up of the city as a  
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38 conurbation of small towns (Jayne, 2004).

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40 Within this context, local museums address wider industrialization and de-industrialization in  
41  
42 a reflexive manner for a largely local audience. Waterton has argued that local visitors to the  
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44 nearby Gladstone Pottery Museum are actively engaged in using the industrial past for  
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46 processes of identity and meaning-making important in the preservation of working-class  
47  
48 heritage (2011, 360). Similarly, the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery showcases a world-  
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50 leading ceramics collection, popularised by 'Ozzy', a 17<sup>th</sup> century Staffordshire slipware owl  
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52 rediscovered on Antiques Roadshow. Fyfe and Ross (1996) have argued that "such artefacts  
53  
54 express the mechanical solidarity that one finds in the Potteries where deep historical  
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56 associations with a manufacturing trade have tended to counter the centrifugal forces of  
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58 modernisation" (p.129). It can be argued, therefore, that local museum collections reflect a  
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60 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,

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3 the Potteries Museum caters to strong local working-class audiences of repeat visitors and to  
4 diverse educational backgrounds:  
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8 <Table 1>  
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11 This paper explores how the display of the Staffordshire Hoard in the Potteries  
12 Museum and Art Gallery is incorporated within these strong local narratives. Local responses  
13 to the Hoard discovery have, perhaps understandably, often focused on its potential to bring  
14 tourism and economic regeneration to the region. Stoke's *Sentinel* newspaper on 2 November  
15 2009, shortly after the discovery was made public, asked 'why shouldn't visitors come here,  
16 for a change – rather than us having to travel to London?'. In October 2011 a trade delegation  
17 from Stoke-on-Trent accompanied the Staffordshire Hoard display to the National  
18 Geographic Museum in Washington D.C. However, as demonstrated below, it would be  
19 wrong to see local enthusiasm for the Hoard as merely prompted by economics. Rather, there  
20 is a strong sense that the Hoard can act as a focus for the restoration of local pride, and a  
21 means of challenging Staffordshire's perceived marginalisation. Although the Hoard predates  
22 Staffordshire's industrial heritage by a millennium (and may prove not have been made in  
23 Mercia at all), it has already been incorporated within local narratives of pride in craft skills  
24 and manufacturing.  
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36 **The Staffordshire Hoard**

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38 The Staffordshire Hoard was found by a local metal detectorist in 2009 (Leahy et al. 2011).  
39 The discovery was reported to the regional Finds Liaison Officer at the Portable Antiquities  
40 Scheme (PAS). Recognising that the objects were over 300 years old and at least 10%  
41 precious metal, they became subject to The Treasure Act 1996 and HM Coroner was  
42 informed. In collaboration with PAS experts, the metal detectorist, and the landowner,  
43 archaeologists from Staffordshire County Council and Birmingham Archaeology returned to  
44 the site in Summer 2009 where further finds were excavated and blocks of earth removed for  
45 X-ray and conservation. An inquest established the legal status of the find which, still caked  
46 in soil, was declared 'Treasure'. The Hoard was evaluated at over 1300 objects, ranging from  
47 a folded gold cross to tiny fragments of silver foil. To protect the anonymity of the site once  
48 the find was made public (typical for PAS finds) a pseudonym was given: 'The Staffordshire  
49 Hoard'.  
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3 Amid international media attention, the formal linking of the treasure with  
4 Staffordshire heightened local public interest. The ‘Staffordshire Hoard’ name, subsequently  
5 trademarked by the owners, provided a hook for local media; encouraging popular  
6 identification with the find and reflecting hope in the Hoard’s potential for local  
7 redevelopment. Despite academic unease (Pitts 2010), scholarly efforts to re-label it the  
8 ‘Staffordshire (Ogley Hay) Hoard’ or link it to the nearby village of Hammerwich have had  
9 little impact on public perceptions (Klein 2013; Webster et al. 2011).  
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14 The Staffordshire Hoard was valued at £3.285m, and the Art Fund led a high profile  
15 campaign to ‘save’ it from being sold on the open market. The British Museum supported a  
16 bid by two regional museums – the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent and  
17 Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (now Birmingham Museums Trust) – to acquire the  
18 Hoard in partnership, each pledging £100,000. The public queued for up to 4 hours at  
19 Birmingham and Stoke to see the finds.  
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26 <Figure 1>  
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29 An intense period of fundraising, with substantial support from local media gathered  
30 more than £900,000 in public contributions. Finally the National Heritage Memorial Fund  
31 gave £1,250,000 to secure the Staffordshire Hoard ‘for the nation’. Building on a successful  
32 partnership between the owners and Staffordshire sites of Anglo-Saxon significance, ‘The  
33 Mercian Trail’ partnership was formed to develop a touring exhibition. Further displays of  
34 the Hoard at Lichfield (site of the Anglo-Saxon bishop of Mercia), Tamworth (the Mercian  
35 royal centre), and Stafford (the eponymous Anglo-Saxon walled town) aimed to sustain  
36 momentum in fundraising for further research and to present the Hoard in its historic context:  
37 the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Mercia. By November 2012, when the field was ploughed again  
38 and 81 more objects were identified, the profile of the Staffordshire Hoard was such that a  
39 single sponsor, royal jewellers Watski of London, quickly offered £57,395 needed to buy  
40 them for the museums.  
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49 The acquisition of the Staffordshire Hoard marked the beginning of the research  
50 process, with c.4,000 objects collected for analysis (Fern 2014). It is both a unique individual  
51 find and also a remarkable collection of objects that were damaged in antiquity before being  
52 placed in the ground. Each piece represents an investment of scarce precious metals, time,  
53 and craft skill in an overt display of 7<sup>th</sup>-century Anglo-Saxon elite identity. Early scholarly  
54 theories to explain the Hoard have ranged from a ritual deposit or shrine, to a smith’s hoard  
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3 or battlefield loot (Webster et al. 2011).<sup>3</sup> The Hoard is very unusual in an Anglo-Saxon  
4 context; it is a 'male' assemblage of dismembered war-gear (without sword blades), and lacks  
5 coins, jewellery, and female dress accessories (ibid., 221). The weaponry elements including  
6 c.85 sword hilt pommels and remains of a helmet; these were potent symbols of masculine  
7 authority in the warrior culture that created the early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms (Fern 2014;  
8 Härke 1990). Some larger objects are overtly Christian: a processional cross, a pectoral cross,  
9 and an inscribed gold strip with martial passages reworked from the Old Testament; 'Rise up,  
10 Lord, and may your enemies be dispersed and those who hate you flee from your face'.  
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16 Fischer, Soulat, and Linton-Fischer (2013) have argued that the Staffordshire Hoard  
17 can be read as evidence of a 'kleptocracy', a society dominated by warfare and looting where  
18 sword fittings and other symbols of individual elite identity could be redistributed to express  
19 new social bonds and political authority, or be removed from circulation to deactivate them  
20 and disarm opponents. A small number of pieces were over a century old when buried,  
21 including worn silver pommels, such that depicting a male face which may have been made  
22 on the Continent [Figure 2]; perhaps some were recognisable as heirlooms identified with  
23 particular historic identities, lineages, or legendary origins.  
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31 <Figure 2>  
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35 How these objects came to be buried together is unknown. Archaeological  
36 investigation has been unable yet to reveal a context for the Staffordshire Hoard beyond its  
37 location: a prominent ridge, overlooking Roman Watling Street in the heartlands of the  
38 Mercian kingdom (Dean et al. 2010). Due to the requirements of the 'treasure' process and  
39 fundraising campaign, the Hoard went on public display still caked in soil soon after its  
40 discovery, before the research process began. This early sense of mystery, so frustrating to  
41 archaeologists, seems to have encouraged interpretation from both museum volunteers and  
42 the general public. The present relatively undefined nature of the Staffordshire Hoard offers a  
43 blank slate on which different personal, regional, and national identities can be inscribed.  
44 This 'provisionality' (Wagner-Pacifici 1996) arguably lends the Hoard some of its  
45 psychological appeal: that this new discovery could not immediately be authoritatively  
46 categorised by historians and archaeologists has allowed museum visitors and wider publics  
47 to 'work through' its significance. This process of 'working through', as carried out and  
48 facilitated by museum volunteers, is the focus of our analysis.  
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### 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.<sup>4</sup> 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

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2  
3 relative homogeneity among focus group participants was not premeditated, but may reflect  
4 volunteer availability on a weekday morning.  
5

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

29 To facilitate discussion, we asked participants to write down three words about what the  
30 Staffordshire Hoard meant to them. The volunteers immediately identified the Hoard as a  
31 means of addressing the perceived marginalisation of Staffordshire:  
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36 **P1<sup>5</sup>:** The first word that came to me is proud, I feel pride in both the fact that  
37 we have some of the Staffordshire Hoard here and also proud when I show it to  
38 other people. The second word I wrote down was awe because I am in awe of  
39 the workmanship involved and the third thing was, I feel that it connects us,  
40 connections to the past.  
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43 **P2:** I put down I was amazed at the craftsmanship of it and sort of the work  
44 involved in doing it, also the fact that it changed conception of the Dark Ages  
45 that everybody thinks that it's just mud huts and no, nobody else and yet they  
46 made that, and also the fact that it is a, local and it does bring sort of more life to  
47 Mercia whereas, which tends to get forgotten as we tend to get forgotten in the  
48 Midlands anyway, 'cos we're neither North nor South or, or anything else.  
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50

51 **P3:** I put down that it was heritage of Staffordshire, I think as (P2) said, we  
52 do get a bit forgotten so I was glad that it spotlighted Staffordshire and gave an  
53 insight to the workmanship that was then when we didn't think there was much  
54 at all and I'm actually passionate about this museum so I was really really  
55 pleased that this was good for the museum.  
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3 **P4:** I've written several words down actually but I think I'll pick out three,  
4 just totally amazing the whole hoard thing is amazing to me and it's especially  
5 amazing because as a host you can see the amazement, you can share the  
6 amazement with visitors and other people I've written unique because although  
7 people come in to the Hoard and say, oh yes I've seen things like that in India or  
8 wherever they've been I still sort of try to pull them back to the concept of it  
9 being made here and it being to do with Staffordshire and inspiring I think is the  
10 other word because it's inspired so much thought and talk and research and, as  
11 (P2) said, changed our concept of what the past was really like.

12  
13 **P5:** I've put down ancestral because it's probably not my ancestors but it's  
14 somebody's ancestors who made that and it gives you a connection with them  
15 that you don't always feel, the people of the Dark Ages. Craftsmanship because I  
16 want to know how they did it, how they did it without magnifying glasses and  
17 what have you. Meaning because I want to know what the symbols and the  
18 patterns mean, I want to know what their significance is, I know that the Saxons  
19 don't do any decoration by accident and I've also put sort of history and blanks  
20 because there are great sort of chunks of our past missing that the Hoard might  
21 eventually fill in when we know a little bit more about it.

22  
23 **P6:** The first word I've put down was exciting because I think the whole  
24 discovery of it, the fact we've got it here and so on is exciting for us and for the  
25 public pride again, local pride, I think it's good for the museum, I think it's good  
26 for Stoke-on-Trent to have, and Staffordshire to have something to celebrate  
27 because there's not much to celebrate in Stoke-on-Trent with the loss of local  
28 industries and so on and it's the pride of local people coming in, saying it's so  
29 good that we've got something we can be proud of and the research interest  
30 which is how they made things and the fact that working here as a volunteer we  
31 get all the latest information on what's been found which is stimulating I think  
32 for us when we're doing our job.

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

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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



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3 comment about the Hoard bringing more life to 'Mercia' effectively blurs the division  
4 between the forgotten Anglo-Saxon past and the present day 'forgetting' of the region. P3  
5 takes up this notion of 'forgetting' and relates it to the heritage of Staffordshire specifically.  
6  
7 In Ashworth and Graham's terms (2005, 5), if we 'create the heritage we require', here the  
8 Hoard is required to 'spotlight' Staffordshire in order to renew its place on the national stage.  
9 P3 stresses the benefits the Hoard will bring to the museum; P6 later expands on this point  
10 and more specifically positions the Hoard *within the museum* as a focus for local pride and  
11 celebration. P6 also explicitly links the local pride engendered by the discovery of the Hoard  
12 and the blow to pride caused by the loss of local industry. The acquisition of the Hoard  
13 thereby becomes not just a means of redressing lost knowledge of the 'Dark Ages' but also  
14 the more recent loss of prominent markers of identity associated with the pottery industry.  
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21 Such narratives echo findings from other post-industrial contexts. Research by both  
22 Newman and McLean (2006) and Walkerdine and Jiminez (2012) suggests that maintaining a  
23 sense of historical continuity can be an important focal point for post-industrial communities.  
24 It could be that emphasis on the craftsmanship and manufacture of Hoard objects attempts to  
25 project historical continuity of the community backwards to incorporate the Anglo-Saxon  
26 period. Smith (1986, 178) has argued that for a reconstruction of the past to serve modern  
27 purposes it must be 'in character'; 'it must intuitively 'belong to' or cohere with, a particular  
28 traditional past. Linking the Hoard with local crafts keeps it in character with pre-existing  
29 craft traditions. The Hoard is thus incorporated into narratives of community pride associated  
30 with the pottery industry, as well as a potential point of celebration to counteract the trauma  
31 associated with its loss.  
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40 The Hoard was explicitly associated with the pottery industry in the *Sentinel*  
41 newspaper, which often stressed the tourist potential of the Hoard alongside the attraction of  
42 the 'world-class collection of pottery and ceramics' in the Potteries Museum. Local  
43 commercial and artistic responses to the Hoard discovery often also deliberately invoke the  
44 ceramics tradition, whether by local firms designing limited edition vases to aid fundraising,  
45 or Stoke-on-Trent City Council commissioning the artist Katharine Morling to create ceramic  
46 sculptures inspired by figures within the Hoard.<sup>6</sup> The choice of ceramics shows how a Hoard  
47 of metalwork has been mediated by the more recent local industrial tradition to create a  
48 'usable past'.  
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55 P4's comment about visitors having seen similar items in India is illuminating since  
56 her response is to ground the items in Staffordshire. Stressing to visitors that the Hoard was  
57 'made here, and to do with Staffordshire' asserts the museum's right to the legal and moral  
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3 ownership of the Hoard. By stressing this local link, museum volunteers act as ‘cultural  
4 intermediaries’ in deciding the messages being encoded around the Hoard (Newman and  
5 McLean 2006). Dicks (2000, 148-51) argues that involving local volunteers in ‘encoding’ the  
6 past can empower local communities, but also indicated that Rhondda volunteers had felt  
7 marginalised when excluded from these processes. In comparison, volunteers at the Potteries  
8 expressed their surprise upon realising that ‘experts’, such as teachers, often lacked  
9 knowledge of the period. They felt empowered to use their newly acquired knowledge and  
10 drew on gallery resources to correct such misconceptions

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

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28 In the next extract, participants discuss the successful fundraising campaign to keep  
29 the Staffordshire Hoard in the region. There is a clear expectation that the Hoard will ‘put  
30 Stoke on the map’, both for tourism and commerce. This exposes an ideological dilemma  
31 (Billig et al. 1988): it is vital that the international importance of the Hoard be recognised,  
32 however, the strength of local connection to the Hoard must also be continuously  
33 emphasised, since arguments for its international importance might push for it to be housed in  
34 a national museum. Thus, the Hoard cannot be constructed as either ‘too parochial’ or ‘too  
35 global’ in its appeal if ‘heritage dissonance’ is to be avoided (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996).  
36 Volunteers discussing the Hoard visitor profile make frequent corrections in order to maintain  
37 this equilibrium:  
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46 **MC:** I’m slightly curious as to what your impression is of the visitors. Do you,  
47 what sorts of people are they? Or what sorts of things do they have

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49 **P3:** Every time they’re different every time

50  
51 **MC:** And are there a lot of local people?

52  
53 **P4:** Yes.

54  
55 **P2:** Yes, I mean say that was from when we first got the Hoard and we were  
56 doing it to raise money. The people who came, it was just absolutely fascinating, I  
57 mean that, I remember one particular one who was, I mean it was a family and it  
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3 was the grandfather and to be local he sounded, he looked like he came from the  
4 neck end of [*local place-name*] which is a fairly rough area to say the least and  
5 literally he got his wallet open and he sort of went, my god, the moths are flying  
6 today, and he put five pounds in to the box, and that would have been a huge  
7 amount to him but he was so passionate that it was here and it got to stay here  
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10 **P3:** The local pride was tremendous. It brought tears to your eyes I was doing  
11 gift aid at the time and people would give fifty pence if that's all they'd got, and  
12 the feeling to keep it local was just tremendous.  
13

14 **P2:** And even now, people come and go, well I'm glad, it's not going to the  
15 British Museum, is it you know [**P4:** you hear that over and over] and you do  
16 have a bit of, well, has it got to be in Birmingham (*laughs*) there would, you know  
17 they would really like it here you know, sort of thing.  
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20 **P3:** But having said that we've had some people from Australia [**SX:** we've  
21 had people from all over] they'd planned to come anyway to Britain but then they  
22 planned it so they could come to the Hoard  
23

24 **P4:** We do, in addition to what (P3)'s just said, we do get people from all  
25 over the world  
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28  
29 P3's initial response stresses the heterogeneity of visitors to the exhibition, establishing that  
30 the Museum does not cater to a narrow demographic. Next, when asked about the prevalence  
31 of local people among visitors, P2 introduces a story about a local man donating money to the  
32 Hoard appeal. This is a good example of what Sacks (1995) has termed 'second stories',  
33 recounting a memory in order to make a point (Taylor 2010). The story emphasizes the  
34 importance of the Hoard to local, 'ordinary' people, and the anecdote of the grandfather with  
35 moths in his wallet accentuates this point. The wider narrative of deep local attachment to the  
36 Hoard is then co-constructed by P3 and P2, using affective language to describe a community  
37 brought together in pursuit of a common goal. This establishes a foundation narrative of the  
38 Hoard having been 'saved' through the collective small donations of ordinary local people,  
39 cementing a sense of local ownership of the Hoard. The Hoard is thereby positioned as a  
40 popular part of Staffordshire's place-identity, with locals glad that it has not been removed to  
41 the British Museum, and reluctant to share it even with Birmingham.  
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50 Having established the strength of local identification with the Hoard, there is a danger  
51 that it may appear merely of parochial interest, undermining previous claims of a  
52 heterogeneous visitor profile. A shift then follows where participants emphasize the  
53 international interest in the Hoard; taking up P3's reference to visitors from Australia,  
54 participants went on to mention visitors from China, Japan, North America, and the  
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3 Netherlands. In contrast with the earlier narrative of Staffordshire as ‘forgotten’, the Hoard  
4 allows Stoke-on-Trent to be constructed as a destination of worldwide note.  
5

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

23 The importance of keeping the original Hoard objects in Staffordshire is arguably as much  
24 cultural and psychological as it is about the inherent material value of the objects. In an  
25 archaeological context, Jones (2010) argues that much of the power of artefacts is invested in  
26 their perceived ‘authenticity’, not defined simply by the originality of the objects but also  
27 produced through “the negotiation of inalienable relationships between objects, people and  
28 places”:  
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36 In respect to objects, it is the relationships embodied by their cultural biographies,  
37 from their origins to the present day, which inform the experience of authenticity  
38 and its powerful impact on people’s lives (Jones 2010, 198).  
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42 The dense Staffordshire soil or ‘mud’ which caked the artefacts when they were first  
43 displayed [Fig. 3] has become part of their ‘cultural biography’, and acted alongside the  
44 campaign to ‘save’ the Hoard to form perceptions of it as local and authentic, reinforcing the  
45 link with Staffordshire and its people. A local newspaper editorial of an early display of  
46 Hoard objects at the Potteries Museum was headed ‘Treasures of Staffordshire Hoard are  
47 muddy marvellous’, associating the soil covering the artefacts with belonging and ownership  
48 of the Hoard:  
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53 In a way, that clinging dirt was symbolic of Staffordshire not wanting to give up  
54 one of the most remarkable archaeological treasures ever found in this country.  
55 (*Sentinel*, 8 February 2010)  
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3 Following acquisition, the Hoard was similarly described as returning to its 'home soil'  
4 (17 April 2010), and a Stoke Councillor invited as many visitors as possible to 'share in the  
5 wonder' of how the items 'became buried in Staffordshire soil all those centuries ago' (23  
6 July 2010). Conservation and research requirements dictated that Hoard objects were initially  
7 consolidated for stability rather than cleaned; so objects were first displayed with soil  
8 adhering to their surface. This pragmatic early decision has been woven into narratives of  
9 authenticity around the Hoard. The soil has become shorthand, or a 'material metaphor'  
10 (Tilley 1996), for the very concept of 'belonging'; its presence encodes this recent discovery  
11 with a deeper past, situated in a network of belonging with the landscape and people of  
12 Staffordshire.

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20 <Figure 3 >

21 Within the focus group, the soil also acted as a means of distinguishing the real,  
22 'authentic' objects from replicas. While acknowledging the value of replicas for display and  
23 interpretive purposes, the group were unanimous in their preference for 'the real thing', a  
24 point emphasised below in their comparison with Anglo-Saxon displays at Sutton Hoo  
25 (Suffolk):  
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31 **P2:** I know my brother went to Sutton Hoo and he was devastated at the fact that  
32 it was majority replicas  
33

34 **P4:** So was I because I'd driven all the way down to Suffolk and I didn't realise  
35 that it was all replicas and yeah they're lovely, and you can say, ooh ah [**P2:** yeah,  
36 you want to get a feel for it] but you want to see the real thing, not be told go to  
37 the British Museum  
38

39 **P3:** It's the connection again, isn't it those people in that time.  
40

41 **MS:** Mm, well I was going to bring up precisely that point, (P3), because I know,  
42 (P1) before she left had written down about connections. I wonder is it the very,  
43 the fact that these are physical objects that you can actually see [**P2:** yeah] makes  
44 the connection to that time [**P2:** yeah, yeah] almost more?  
45  
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47 **P5:** And I think up to a point when they were still dirty, the dirt, just the dirt on  
48 them made people connect with them more because we did not know their story if  
49 you like before they were buried, their story as far as we know only happens to  
50 them after they're buried and dug up and the fact that some of them still had dirt  
51 on them made them very immediate to people you know, they haven't just been  
52 lying around in a museum for decades, they've only just come in fresh out the  
53 ground  
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56 **P3:** Well this was the thing [**P2:** they didn't believe it, did they?] we were the first  
57 people to see them since goodness knows when and we didn't realise then how  
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3 valuable the mud was [P2: no] because the mud tells us a lot, seeds, pollen and  
4 whatever, you know bits of fabric maybe,  
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8 The collective focus here is not only on having the ‘real things’ but on having them in  
9 the right place; removing the objects to the British Museum like the Sutton Hoo artefacts  
10 would somehow diminish their attraction. A transactional element emerges whereby the  
11 ‘authentic’ becomes product (Macdonald, 2013); having invested the effort to travel, the  
12 heritage consumer expects to see the ‘real things’ within the ‘correct’ landscape. However,  
13 there are more than economic considerations at work: the housing of these artefacts within  
14 the Potteries Museum has become a form of affective place-identification to which  
15 authenticity is key. P3’s suggestion that the ‘real thing’ creates a connection to ‘those people  
16 in that time’ echoes Jones’ contention that the ‘web of relationships’ which objects invoke  
17 with ‘past and present people and places’ are crucial in situating them as ‘authentic’ (Jones  
18 2009; 2010). P5 specifically invokes the dirt attached to the Hoard objects as crucial to the  
19 story of the Hoard and its immediacy; the almost horticultural imagery associated with the  
20 objects having arrived ‘fresh out of the ground’ constructs them as organic, living things, as  
21 opposed to something that had ‘just been lying around in a museum for decades’.  
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31 Jones (2009, 137) has argued that ‘the materiality of objects embodies the past  
32 experiences and relationships that they have been part of and facilitates some kind of  
33 ineffable contact with those experiences and relationships’. The materiality of the  
34 Staffordshire Hoard seems to be enhanced by the soil, which acts as proof that ‘we were the  
35 first people to see them since goodness knows when’; representing a direct link with an  
36 Anglo-Saxon past. P3’s comment that ‘the mud tells us a lot’ thus has a double meaning; the  
37 mud has a lot to tell both in scientific, and in narrative terms.  
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43 The notion of the Hoard as a ‘living thing’ was mentioned often, with both the Hoard  
44 as a whole and individual items being anthropomorphised:  
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48 **P3:** It is because I get really upset when it has to go somewhere I’m very  
49 possessive

50 **P6:** Yes when you know some pieces are going and it could be your favourite  
51 piece  
52

53 **P2:** Well we all come in and we go, well what’s gone or what have we got back  
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55 **P3:** Or why should it go there?  
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57 **P2:** And sort of, and when we  
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3 **P3:** You do get very emotional

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

8  
9  
10 **P4:** We've got the seahorse

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12  
13 Jones' (2009) research on local identification with the medieval Pictish Hilton of  
14 Cadboll cross-slab illustrated that residents saw it as a living member of the Highland  
15 community, with any prospect of removal or relocation of the slab representing a  
16 'problematic dislocation'. There are notable similarities with this extract, where the  
17 participants describe individual Hoard items in terms of emotional attachment, and their  
18 temporary removal as an upsetting loss. While the Staffordshire Hoard has indeed been  
19 'saved' from permanent removal from the locality, the display at Stoke varies as some objects  
20 undergo research and others are transferred for display at different sites on the 'Mercian  
21 Trail'. As such, the 'problematic dislocation' felt by the participants refers not so much to the  
22 removal of individual 'favourite' Hoard pieces, such as the 'seahorse' [Fig. 4], from the  
23 locality but specifically from the museum. The 'we' referred to by the participants refers to  
24 the museum community, and reflects how, for this group of volunteers, belonging and  
25 identification with the museum is intertwined with an emotional attachment to the Hoard.  
26 Given the role of the museum volunteers in mediating the Hoard for both local and  
27 international visitors, this emotional attachment to the objects lends resonance to their  
28 'belonging' to Staffordshire. It also demonstrates how, for the volunteers, the presence of the  
29 Hoard in the museum goes beyond economic and tourism considerations to become about  
30 affective ownership.  
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45 <Figure 4>

#### 46 47 48 **Conclusion: A marker of the past, a marker in the present**

49 The Staffordshire Hoard shows that public interest in new discoveries can stimulate non-  
50 visitors into rethinking what Merriman (1991) has termed cultural and social aversions to  
51 visiting museums. Local volunteers support this process and are 'active in appropriating their  
52 own heritage', encouraging new learning and harnessing community feeling (Orr 2006, 202).  
53 A representative from the Potteries Museum suggested that, in customer feedback, the use of  
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3 volunteer hosts was one of the ‘most successful’ aspects of the exhibition. It has been argued  
4 that volunteers are both a resource and an audience for museums (Goodlad and McIvor 1998)  
5 but are potentially a ‘neglected’ part of its audience, motivated by enjoyment (Holmes 2003).  
6  
7 Focus-group volunteers were clear that, while motivated by the desire to help in the local  
8 community, there was also a desire for personal development or ‘serious leisure’ (Orr 2006).  
9  
10 A significant part of their satisfaction with the role came from working alongside salaried  
11 staff and the privileged access to knowledge and support this offers. Volunteers maintain  
12 positive identities as a key part of the museum community by developing working  
13 relationships with staff and other volunteers as well as museum visitors, and through the  
14 recognition and awards that Staffordshire Hoard exhibitions have received, thereby  
15 contributing to the long term sustainability of the Hoard.  
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21 Research on the Staffordshire Hoard is ongoing. In scholarly circles, it has entered  
22 debates about how the groups who became known as Angles and Saxons came to identify  
23 themselves with the landscape of Britain, how elites maintained their status and developed a  
24 new Christian identity, and how they interacted with an existing British population. The  
25 campaign to acquire the Hoard is cited as a model for successful museum fundraising (French  
26 and Runyard 2011). Nevertheless, despite strong public support, local museums have also  
27 been substantially outbid for metal-detected finds which did not qualify as ‘treasure’: e.g. the  
28 Crosby Garrett Roman Helmet, made of copper alloy, which reached £2m at auction (Worrell  
29 2010). Academic coverage of the Staffordshire Hoard itself has reflected on the difficulties of  
30 the early investigation (Carver 2011), and some argue that the display of a single assemblage  
31 across multiple locations may ‘obscure its archaeological value’ (James 2011, 1071).  
32  
33 Notwithstanding these concerns and with the Hoard’s historical meanings yet to be fully  
34 understood, these exhibitions allow modern meanings to be negotiated and sustained. The  
35 varied themes addressed by different Mercian Trail sites – the Hoard’s Christian past at  
36 Lichfield Cathedral, its conservation at Birmingham, or its archaeological significance at  
37 Stoke-on-Trent – alongside the use of local volunteers may help to avoid ‘dissonance’ for the  
38 Staffordshire Hoard in its interpretation.  
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49 Many of the individual objects uncovered were markers of personal and group  
50 identity in the distant past and collectively, as a newly-discovered Hoard, they have become a  
51 marker of identity in contemporary Staffordshire. Volunteers help visitors to frame the  
52 objects within overlapping identifications: past and present; within the museum itself;  
53 between local, regional, national and international contexts. Within this nexus, the emphasis  
54 on having the right things – objects rather than replicas – in the right place is given emotional  
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3 resonance by volunteer attachment to specific objects. A sense of ownership and belonging,  
4 verified by the presence of ‘Staffordshire soil’, is accentuated by situating the Hoard within  
5 local craft traditions. In Jones’ (2009, 2010) terms, it is possible to trace networks of  
6 inalienable relationships between people, objects, and places incorporating the Staffordshire  
7 Hoard: this analysis has demonstrated the important role of the museum volunteers in co-  
8 constructing the narratives that give voice to these relationships and, in so doing, mediating  
9 wider understandings of the significance of the Hoard.  
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15 Public interest in the Staffordshire Hoard discovery and support for the fundraising  
16 campaign has created a new regional context for the Anglo-Saxon past. Alongside its high  
17 media profile, the naming of the ‘Staffordshire Hoard’ has helped to frame the modern  
18 identity and relevance of these ancient artefacts for local people, stimulating for some a  
19 strong emotional attachment and a sense of ownership and belonging. This may explain why  
20 Stoke, the county deposit museum for Staffordshire archaeological finds, is portrayed as a  
21 more ‘natural home’ for the Hoard than Birmingham, despite being twice the distance from  
22 the findspot. Such responses may also reflect existing attitudes to Birmingham, as the  
23 dominant ‘metropolis’, and other relations historically embedded within the region (Capper,  
24 Scully & Brown in prep.). Public reflection on the Hoard and its discovery has opened up  
25 cultural and psychological space for consideration and negotiation of Staffordshire’s current  
26 position within the nation. A new engagement with the Anglo-Saxon past has become a way  
27 to challenge the region’s post-industrial marginalisation, and build a new regional identity,  
28 which incorporates existing pride in craftwork as a response to a perception of past skills and  
29 regional prominence being ‘forgotten’.  
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40 As research progresses, it will be useful to consider how identity narratives founded  
41 on the Hoard’s ‘Staffordshireness’ respond to the probability that its constituent objects were  
42 produced elsewhere. How will completion of the cleaning and conservation of these objects  
43 impact on the present clear dichotomy between ‘authentic’, soil-encrusted objects compared  
44 to their replicas? If the current power of the Hoard to attract identification rests on its  
45 provisionality, as suggested here, what will happen when more is known? Equally, how will  
46 such developments interact with broader questions of regional identity that have resurfaced in  
47 contemporary politics, both in England in response to the referendum on Scottish  
48 independence and for corresponding questions of regional autonomy throughout Europe?  
49 Will ‘Mercia’, for so long a forgotten footnote in English history, begin to re-enter  
50 contemporary popular and political discourse? The prospect of the campaign to ‘save’ the  
51 Staffordshire Hoard prefiguring a popular sentiment for greater local and regional autonomy  
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3 is an intriguing one, and suggests that archaeological discoveries can re-awaken unresolved  
4 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	6	4.36
Yearly visits to other Museums/Galleries	2.33	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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<sup>2</sup> Funded by DCMS to encourage voluntary recording of archaeological objects found by the public in England and Wales; <http://www.finds.org.uk>.

<sup>3</sup> Papers from a PAS symposium on the Staffordshire Hoard: <http://finds.org.uk/staffshoardsymposium>

<sup>4</sup> Figures provided by the Potteries Museum.

<sup>5</sup> These extracts have been modified slightly to ensure anonymity and legibility.

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