

Re-excavating Egypt: unlocking the potential in ancient Egyptian collections in the UK

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This paper offers a summary and critical assessment of several different projects carried out in regional museums with ancient Egyptian collections. The projects involved cataloguing and reactivating collections, creating and merging databases, collating archives, development of web resources, preparation of collection reviews, and formation of the subject specialist network, The Association for Curators of Collections from Egypt and Sudan (ACCES).

While the largest ancient Egyptian collections in the UK are of course well known, nearly 200 smaller museums and institutions within that geographical remit also hold ancient Egyptian objects. Many of these are familiar to researchers through the distribution lists included in site publications, because they hold rare or unusual objects, or because their donors were famous individuals. Some smaller museums have displays of their objects, raising public awareness, but many are “orphaned” collections, formed through the motivation of a few individuals but left largely untouched subsequently. Importantly, a significant percentage of these collections contain excavated material and therefore as a group they can also be considered part of a distributed national and, in fact, international collection. The *Forming Material Egypt* conference has amply illustrated the growing interest in these smaller collections, particularly because of their archaeological contexts. As more projects to investigate these collections are developed, it is perhaps useful to look back and critically assess a selection of projects that related to these UK Egyptian collections.

Petrie Museum distribution and reactivation project (2002–2004)

The aim of this project, funded by the Designation Challenge Fund and Museums, Libraries and Archives (MLA), was to begin to reunite “virtually” the dispersed objects from the excavations by William Matthew Flinders Petrie