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## Reconnecting Thomas Gann with British Interest in the Archaeology of Mesoamerica: An Aspect of the Development of Archaeology as a University Subject

**Colin Wallace**  
University of Liverpool  
(*c.r.wallace@liv.ac.uk*)

### Introduction

‘He [Thomas Gann] was lecturer in Central American archaeology at the University of Liverpool (1919–1938), and adviser to the British Museum expeditions to British Honduras’ (*Dictionary of National Biography* 1931–1940 [1949]: 306).

Thus wrote the great archaeologist of the Maya, Sir John Eric Thompson (1898–1975), who knew Thomas Gann, the subject of this paper, from around 1926 until his death, and memorialised him elsewhere in the *Boletín Bibliográfico de Antropología Americana* (Thompson 1940) and the *British Medical Journal* (Thompson 1975). Curiously, all published sources, including Thompson, are seriously mistaken about Gann’s Liverpool connection, wrongly dating it to the period when it was inactive or had lapsed. Thus, ‘from 1919 to 1938 Gann was Lecturer in Central American Archaeology at Liverpool University, the first Americanist ever to hold a university position in Britain. I have never come across anyone who went to his lectures (I am not even sure if he gave any) and he seems to have trained no students’ (Bray 1994: 6; cf. also Bray and Glover 1987: 119). I shall offer some new archival evidence to correct this. We shall also see that Bray’s conception of Gann as a British, university, ancestor, if an odd one, is unhelpful (but understandable); Gann’s position says as much about the

atmosphere of the early years at Liverpool University (Freeman *In preparation*; James *In preparation*) as it does about the study of Ancient America in Britain during the first few decades of the twentieth century.

Recent historical research in the School of Archaeology, Classics and Egyptology at Liverpool (the direct descendant of the Institute of Archaeology with which Gann was connected), by Mac James, our supervisor Dr Philip Freeman and myself, has included exploring the papers of Francis Chatillon Danson, an important early supporter of the Institute. The following paper is based on the Danson papers, now in National Museums Liverpool (Archives Department). In this paper I will introduce the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Central American archaeologist Thomas Gann; explore what his real connection was with the University of Liverpool 'back home'; discuss some of the difficulties we currently encounter in studying the practice of early British Central American archaeology, and offer some conclusions: chiefly, that what we are really struck by is not so much working in the field in Belize a hundred or so years ago, but the early years of archaeology as a discipline at Liverpool (and England), when its promoters were making it up as they went along.

### **Thomas Gann and the Archaeology of Central America**

Thomas William Francis Gann, MRCS, LRCP, FRGS (Member of the Royal College of Surgeons; Member of the Royal College of Physicians of London; Fellow of the Royal Geographic Society) (1867–1938), was a well connected member of the medical and intellectual societies of London. He was a District Medical Officer, and later the Principal Medical Officer, in what was known as British Honduras, and now is Belize, from 1894 until 1923. He had gone to Central America in the early 1890s as the leader of a medical expedition aiming 'to relieve those suffering from the result of an earthquake in Guatemala' (*The Times*, 25/01/1938: 18).

Gann was arguably Belize's first Maya-period archaeologist, exploring Classic Santa Rita near his base at Corozal, the Classic ceremonial centre of Xunantunich (1894–95 and 1924), Late Classic Nohmul (later in the 1890s, with excavations 1908–09 and more excavations 1935–36 at least) and the Late Classic ceremonial centre at Lubaantún (1903 and returning 1924–25, before the British Museum expedition of 1926). Much of Gann's accumulated notes were published by the Bureau of American Ethnology at the Smithsonian Institution, as *The Maya Indians of Southern Yucatan and Northern British Honduras* (1918). He went on exploring and publishing until almost the end of his life. His final season at Nohmul was in 1936, and there were seven books published up to 1938 (and one posthumous report). Gann also collaborated with Eric Thompson on *The History of the Maya From the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, which was published in 1931.

Mid-way through his career in 1908, Gann became the (honorary) lecturer in Central American Antiquities at the new Institute of Archaeology of the University of Liverpool, England (not long after he had completed a Diploma in Tropical Medicine there). Subscribers from Liverpool funded several of his fieldwork seasons in Central America up until 1912, and Gann deposited his collection with the Institute, but this connection to Liverpool University faltered after the First World War.

### **'Destructive, ... notorious, ... telling tall tales' – Gann in Retrospect**

David Pendergast's review of the development of archaeological research in Belize accords Gann a place in the rudimentary beginnings of that country's field archaeology, as someone whose methods 'remained more destructive than protective of evidence from beginning to end' (Pendergast 1993: 4). Describing Gann as 'notorious', Heather McKillop and Jaime Awe go on to describe him as being 'more concerned with recovering aesthetically pleasing artefacts than with careful excavation and reporting, as attested by his dynamite holes in some mounds' (McKillop and Awe 1983: 2). While Gann certainly told the Society of Antiquaries of London, in February 1897, that he had by then opened 'between 50 and 60 mounds in British Honduras, Guatemala and Yucatan' (Gann 1897: 308), neither this account, or earlier and later ones (e.g. Gann 1895; 1918) mentions the use of such drastic excavation methods.

He was carefully described as an ‘explorer’ rather than as an archaeologist in one obituary (*The Times*, 25/02/1938: 18). Gann also has a place in the history of research on Maya vase painting (cf. Miller 1989: 131), thanks to the excavating, collecting and studies described in his major 1918 publication. However, it is clear from that book, with its almost complete lack of section drawings, and recurring mentions of excavating from the summits though the centres of the mounds, that his excavation techniques were old-fashioned and not advanced (cf. Ashbee 1960: 20–21, 184). What is not clear is where/when/and from whom Gann learnt whatever excavation techniques he possessed. By the time that he comes into view in Britain, at least in 1895, he was working independently on the mounds in Belize.

Pendergast makes the overall point that the Caribbean coastal zone – to which Belize belongs – was for too long viewed by explorers and archaeologists as peripheral to the western Maya lowlands (and views all earlier work in this light). Meanwhile, Norman Hammond, noting simply that Belize had an entirely distinct history of archaeological research to its neighbouring countries, discussed Gann more sympathetically, as the only active archaeologist in what was then British Honduras until at least World War 1, and avoided judging him by modern standards (Hammond 1983: 19–21). Gann was active during what was described as the period of the ‘Major Scholars’ (1840–1924) elsewhere, but it was only in Hammond’s succeeding ‘Institutional’ period (1924–1970) that British and American expeditions worked in Belize – the British prompted by Gann’s discoveries – and some much improved legislative protection for sites and monuments began. Indeed, the 1924 and 1929 revisions of the original, 1894 and 1897, Belizean antiquities legislation, have been seen as a contemporary response to Gann’s excesses in excavations (Hammond 1983: 22).

It is clear from these histories that Gann, when working in the 1920s and 1930s, and in the absence of other serious local interest until quite later on, was very much out of step with contemporary archaeological field methods and ethics. Thus one can conceivably write of ‘two’ Ganns: one reporting his discoveries in learned journals to reasonable contemporary standards (1890s–1910s) and the other (1920s–1930s) giving in to a ‘predilection for telling tall tales’, in Norman Hammond’s words (1983: 20). For example, at Lubaantún, and in the judgement of those who worked there in the 1970s, Gann did enough during his initial visit to put the site on record, and then produced the best plan (until recently) of the place on his third visit in 1925. But then he ‘blotted his copybook’ by publishing two different contemporary accounts of his original 1903 trip and romanticising his second visit in 1924 as a new discovery (Hammond 1972: 7–9 & 12–15; Brunhouse 1975: 82).

Gann was involved with the fieldwork in the Yucatán undertaken by the Carnegie Institution’s Department of Central American Archaeology. This was where he met and befriended Eric Thompson, while working as an ‘unpaid staff physician’, in the 1920s at least (Givens 1992: 142). Gann also had met the Carnegie’s archaeologist Sylvanus Morley (1883–1948) in 1914 at Corozal (Brunhouse 1971: 86). He then worked for Morley in 1916 at Tulum, Mexico (*op cit.*: 97–99), and on his 1918 expedition (*op cit.*: 142–147). They too became friends, but Gann’s continued personal collecting, in the case of an exceptional piece of Maya jade allegedly illegally exported by him from Mexico ca. 1923, had a detrimental effect on the career of his patron (*op cit.*: 211; Givens 1992: 142–143). Gann also got the kind-hearted Morley into trouble on another occasion (Brunhouse 1975: 137–138).

### **The Limits of Practitioners’ History?**

To some, it might seem wrong or unfair to treat Thomas Gann separately from the remainder of the history of archaeology in Belize. However, I do not wish to give the impression that Gann did well for his time – hardly so, whether as discussed in the more detailed works by Hammond, McKillop and Awe, and Pendergast, already cited – and remembering that recognisably stratigraphic excavations and recording were going on elsewhere during most of the period of Gann’s work, e.g. by William Henry Holmes (1846–1933) in the Valley of Mexico, in the 1880s (Schavélzon 1999), and by Manuel Gamio (1883–1960) at Azcapotzalco in the Valley of Mexico, in the 1910s (Browman and Givens 1996: 87–91).

Instead, it is important to follow the impact that Gann made ‘back home’ in England in the late 1900s, and for that it has been necessary to pay some attention to the fieldwork that brought him to notice in Liverpool and London, however unfavourably it is now viewed by current practitioners. To some he is a figure of fun, for example, one of the interim reports on the Corozal Postclassic Project was entitled ‘Ganned But Not Forgotten’ (Chase 1985). Others, as noted above, felt some anger towards him. Perhaps because the main evaluatory framework available was/is a present-day one, the study of individuals in the history of Belizean archaeology can seem mostly to be about their impact on their present-day successors (the ‘Prolific Pioneer’ or ‘Mound Mauler’ dilemma, cf. Milanitch 2000). Those who profess to be ‘Intellectual Historians’ often take aim at the limitations of ‘practitioners’ history’, as isolating archaeological endeavour too much, and making uncritical use of historical sources (e.g. Kuklik 1996, 238; though see now Abadia 2010). I wish to avoid both pitfalls, by making it clear that my focus in this piece is on England, not Belize.

### **The Liverpool Connection – Beginnings in 1908**

Early in 1908 Thomas Gann was appointed Special Lecturer in Central American Antiquities (and Director of Excavations in British Honduras) at the new Institute of Archaeology, at the University of Liverpool (*Annual Report of the Institute of Archaeology* 1907–8: 18–19), a connection likely to be the result of his studying for a Diploma in Tropical Medicine at Liverpool the year before (*The Times*, 17/01/1908: 13). As far as I can establish, Gann’s U. K. archaeological connections began in 1895, when one of his short papers was read to the Society of Antiquaries of London by its Vice-President, A. W. Franks (Gann 1895). Two years later, Gann himself was present at the Antiquaries to deliver his longer ‘On the Contents of Some Ancient Mounds in Central America’ (Gann 1897). In September 1903, he had addressed the meeting of the British Association (Section H – Anthropology) at Southport, on ‘The Ancient Monuments of Northern Honduras and the Adjacent Parts of Yucatan and Guatemala’ (*The Times*, 15/09/1903: 8; Gann 1905).

From a memorandum of 21/1/1908, sent by Professor J. L. Myres of the Institute of Archaeology to one of its benefactors, the Liverpool businessman Francis Chatillon Danson (1855–1926), we can see how this came about:

‘Provision for Central American Archaeology ... It is believed that if he [Dr Gann] were to be associated with the staff of the Liverpool Institute of Archaeology, he would be willing to allow the collections [about 1000 objects, earlier in the document called ‘one of the finest collections of examples of this little known civilisation’] to be housed at the Institute and to illustrate it by occasional lectures when he is in England. It is suggested therefore that a lectureship in Central American antiquities should be granted by the Institute, with a honorarium of say £20 to £40, and that Dr Gann be invited to hold this lectureship on the understanding that during his tenure of it he deposits his collections at the Institute to serve as the nucleus of a department of Central American Archaeology ...’ (The source, for all archival quotes in this piece, unless otherwise stated: *Papers of F. C. Danson, D/D V 2/32, Folder B: Danson Collection, National Museums Liverpool, Archives Department*).

Gann’s position was organised in more detail in March 1908. ‘The Committee of the Central American Antiquities’ dined Dr Gann at the University Club after his inaugural lecture on Friday, March 13 (note: 04/3/1908). Before that event, Myres wrote again to Danson (letter, 10/3/1908), enclosing a draft scheme for excavation that ‘embodies the points of our talk today’. The draft commission to Dr Gann allowed the Committee to fund him for £50 of work:

‘on excavation on ancient sites in British Honduras ... to secure an adequate record of the nature of the deposits in which artefacts are found, the relative position of all important objects, the plan and construction of all walls and other traces of buildings and in general all observations which may serve to determine the character, purpose, and relative date of the mounds and their contents’,

and subject to a satisfactory report that includes 'the conditions on which antiquities found in such excavations will be permitted to leave that country'.

This draft constitution of the 'Central American Committee' sets out two distinct classes of members: Subscribing Members, 'who in consideration of subscriptions to the Excavation Fund shall be entitled to proportionate shares of the objects found in the excavations ... [and who] *may* at any time deposit any or all of his share, on loan or permanently, at the Institute of Archaeology'; and Advisory Members, who were experts in archaeology, not be entitled to any share of the objects found.

The resulting British Honduras Excavations Committee is listed in the Institute's *Annual Reports* as Professor R. Boyce, Professor R. C. Bosanquet, F. C. Danson, Thomas Gibson, Professor Macdonald Mackay, Professor Myres, Professor Newberry and Alec Rea. As such, it comprised five Liverpool professors: three from the Institute (classical archaeologist Bosanquet, ancient historian Myres, Egyptologist Newberry), unlike the other subscriber-filled committees supporting Institute fieldwork. Rubert Boyce (1863–1911), the George Holt Professor of Pathology (from 1894) and first Dean of the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (where Gann had studied), had visited British Honduras in 1905 at the special request of the Colonial Office to report on an outbreak of Yellow Fever there (*pers. inf.* P. W. M. Freeman). Being an active supporter of the new Institute, and with this connection reinforced by Gann's Liverpool studies, Boyce may have been the marriage-broker or main strategist here.

Those putting money into the excavation fund over the few years the 'Central American Committee' was active are recorded in the *Annual Reports* as F. C. Danson, Alec Rea, D. P. McEwan, Mrs Rathbone, James Rea and T. Woodsend. Danson, as mentioned earlier, was a Liverpool average loss-adjuster, and collector of antiquities, a major civic philanthropist and a benefactor of the Institute. Alec Rea (1878–1953) was another local subscriber to Institute projects, son and nephew of other Institute benefactors, who served the Institute as Hon Treasurer 1907–11 and 1913–19. D. P. McEwan is currently unknown. Mrs Rathbone, was presumably, but not certainly, Emily Rathbone (1837–1918), the wife of the major University benefactor William Rathbone VI. James Rea was a Liverpool ship-owner and businessman, supporter of the work of the Liverpool Institute's founder, Professor John Garstang, in Egypt and the uncle of Alec Rea. Thomas Woodsend was, amongst other things, a director of the Anglo-South American Bank (*pers. inf.* P. W. M. Freeman).

According to a letter from the Institute's Secretary Professor Garstang to Danson (19/6/08), mentioning a June 18 resolution of the Institute's Finance Committee, it was:

'Reported and agreed that the Honduras Excavation Fund is a distinct fund deposited with the Institute of Archaeology and applicable solely, under the direction of the Honduras Committee to the conduct of excavations in British Honduras. The Institute will include in its published statement of account a separate statement of receipts and expenditure on account of the Honduras Excavations Fund'.

Money for fieldwork was soon being sought: in a letter from Myres to Danson (06/4/08), it is reported that Dr Gann thinks that 'this [the dry season, up to the end of June] is much the best time of year for excavation ... I think it would be very satisfactory if we were able to put a small sum, say £30 or £40, at his disposal at once ...'. Another letter, Myres to Danson (07/5/08), acknowledged Danson's £10 for Dr Gann's fieldwork, sent two days previously. Myres reported that Gann had acquired the necessary permissions. The 1908–09 fieldwork took in a range of sites in the north of the country (Benque Viejo, Chetumal Bay, Condejo, (around) Corzal, Douglas, Patchacan, Saltillo, San Esteven and Sarteneja) as well as at Moho Cay and Boston in the south. Myres hoped for a full report for the Institute's new journal, the *Annals of Archaeology and Anthropology* (so, Gann 1912); a preliminary account appeared in the *Annual Report* (1907–08: 19). Meanwhile, in a note, Myres to Danson (10/10/08), 'the enclosed extracts from a letter from Dr Gann will interest you, I am sure ...'; this is no longer on file; there is a letter elsewhere (of 17/9/08), from Gann to Myres reporting work up to that date, in D/D V 2/33 Folder C.

## The Liverpool Connection – Still Active in 1911

After a brief hiatus (*Annual Report 1909–10*: 10), there was more fieldwork in 1911–12, on ‘a group of large sepulchral mounds near the mouth of the Rio Hondo, where in former years he made some very good finds’ (*Annual Report 1910–11*: 17) and ‘mounds in Southern Yucatan and along the Northern Frontier of British Honduras’ (*Annual Report 1912–13*: 18). Gann’s 1916 publication, in the Institute’s journal, covered a series of mounds in the Corozal region and a *choltun* (a limestone cave) at Yalloch in neighbouring Guatemala.

An initial excavation fund of £55 had been raised, of which £40 was spent in the first season (*Annual Report 1907–08*: 29). Danson contributed £10, D. P. McEwan (through Professor Boyce) £20, Mrs Rathbone £5, Alec Rea £10 and T. Woodsend £10. £25 was spent in the second season, thanks to an additional £10 provided by James Rea (*Annual Report 1908–09*: 27). A new fund of £30 was then raised ‘for enabling Dr Gann to continue his excavations’ (*Annual Report 1909–10*: 28), and subscribed to by Danson, Alec Rea and James Rea, at £10 each (*Annual Report 1910–11*: 17, 31). A further donation of £10 from Woodsend ca. 1912 covered £5 paid to Professor Myres (Statement of Accounts in *Annual Report 1911–12*), perhaps for more of the finds restoration noted below.

## The Liverpool Connection – Now Inactive, But Continuing

There was a proposed revival in 1914, according to a letter from M. E. Williams, Institute Assistant Secretary, to Danson (11/5/14): ‘Dr Gann has written in a letter to Professor Garstang saying that he will be glad to undertake further excavations in British Honduras if some money can be sent out to him during the present month. If there is a general wish to co-operate again Professor Garstang will be glad to make the arrangements. He suggests a subscription of £15 each ...’ [Enclosed with the letter is an extract from Gann’s original letter, seeking £60 in total (source: *Papers of F. C. Danson, D/D V 2/38*, Danson Collection, National Museums Liverpool, Archives Department). But no activity is recorded in the accounts attached to the *Annual Reports* and the British Honduras Excavations Committee disappears from the record during World War 1. The last £2 and seventeen shillings in the fund itself disappeared ca. 1923 (last noted in the Statement of Accounts in *Annual Report 1922*).

In 1917, if not before, Gann had definitely transferred his allegiance to the new American institutions now working in Mesoamerican archaeology:

‘Dr. Thomas Gann, who was engaged in archaeological explorations in British Honduras during the years 1917 and 1918 for the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, New York has become connected with the Carnegie Institution of Washington, and will take an active part in the proposed explorations at Chichen Itza, Yucatan’ (From: ‘Anthropological Notes’, *American Anthropologist new series* 26: 2 [April–June 1924]: 306, cf. also *nser.* 20: 2 [April–June 1918]: 246, *Man* 18 [1918]: 32 & 192 and see earlier for his Carnegie connections from 1916).

Gann was still listed in post at Liverpool University through to 1935, but there are no more records of excavation activities in the Annual Reports, other than a brief visit to the city by him in 1924 (*Annual Report 1924*: 17–18, cf. also *1925*: 16–17 which must be referring to Gann’s Lubaantún work) and then he seems to have drifted out of contact (*Annual Report 1926*: 16). One obituary does refer to ‘a series of addresses which he delivered at Liverpool University as Lecturer on Central American Archaeology’ at about this time (*The Times*, 25/02/1938: 18). He later reviewed J. Leslie Mitchell’s *The Conquest of the Maya* (1934) for the Institute’s journal, in the *Liverpool Annals of Archaeology & Anthropology* (21 [1934]: 137–138). He died, in a London nursing home, in February 1938.

## The Impact of Thomas Gann in Britain – His Collection?

Gann’s collection – after all, one of the key reasons for offering Gann a post in 1908 – needs to be researched, but the lack of either an Institute of Archaeology collection catalogue (*pers. inf.* Mac

James) or a Gann collection catalogue, currently makes this difficult. The Committee of the Institute of Archaeology were told in general about the attractiveness of Gann's collection, in January 1908:

'For some years he has occupied his leisure in the study of the antiquities of Honduras and other parts of Central America and has collected a large number of examples of pottery, stone implements, and plaster work in relief from mounds and other sites in Honduras. The collection numbers altogether about 1000 objects and is certainly one of the finest collections of examples of this little known civilisation, which is akin to that of Mexico, and probably belongs to the centuries immediately preceding the Spanish conquest. Dr Gann is himself one of the best authorities on the antiquities of Honduras, and has contributed a valuable paper on the subject to the report of the US Bureau of Ethnology. Dr Gann's collection is at present housed very inadequately in the south of England. He himself returns to Honduras in March next. It is believed that if he was to be associated with the staff of the Liverpool Institute of Archaeology, he would be willing to allow the collection to be housed at the Institute and to illustrate it by occasional lectures when he is in England ...' (30/01/1908: University of Liverpool Sydney Jones Library Special Collections & Archives, S149 *Minute Book of the General Committee of the Institute of Archaeology*: 95–96).

Both Gann's collection and new finds from fieldwork are briefly mentioned in the Annual Reports; e.g. 'the objects found have already been consigned to Liverpool' (*Annual Report 1908–09*: 19) and 'a further series of specimens have been received from him [Dr Gann] for the special committee and have been repaired under the supervision of Professor Myres' (*Annual Report 1909–10*: 10). Gann was said to be at work on an illustrated catalogue of the loan collection in 1911 (*Annual Report 1910–11*: 17; Gann 1912: 72), but then there is no further mention of this. £2 and three shillings of the Honduras Fund were spent on 'freight and cartage' ca. 1914 (Statement of Accounts in *Annual Report 1913–14*).

The collection was still at the Institute later in 1914, when it took over further premises at Bedford Street (*Annual Report 1914–15*: 9) and the objects were re-arranged by the new Assistant Secretary Meta Williams (*op cit.*, 10; *Annual Report 1915–19*: 14). An additional donation of Peruvian material by F. H. Vaughan (possibly a local ship-owner: *pers. inf.* Dr P. W. M. Freeman) 'greatly enriched our collection of American ceramics' (*Annual Report 1915–19*: 15). Thereafter silence, that is, in the aftermath of the Institute's move to 11 Abercromby Square nearby in 1920. At some point the collection moved to the Liverpool City Museum; it was noted as being there in 1918 (Smith 1918: 161). This particular move is part of the interesting history of changing relations between the new Institute and the older, Public Museum in the city of Liverpool, treated in more detail elsewhere (James *In preparation*).

In his *Dictionary of National Biography* entry for Gann, Eric Thompson wrote of the wartime destruction of the collection at the Institute, 'the full damage to which has yet to be ascertained' (*DNB 1931–1940* [1949]: 305). It was of course the city museum – where Gann's collection now was – that was greatly bomb-damaged in 1941 (Millard 2010: 57–61). Subsequent collections made by Gann existed, whether his collection of Maya carved jadeite and basalt now in the British Museum (*The Times*, 16/05/1938: 21; 10/10/1938: 11; Joyce 1938), a small pottery collection also now in the British Museum (Digby 1954) or fieldwork collections in New Orleans (Middle American Research Institute: *DNB 1931–1940* [1949]: 305), and in New York (Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, originally in Bristol: Hammond 1983: 20, cf. Miller 1989: 131; Gann 1918: 13).

National Museums Liverpool (NML), the successor to the city museum of 1918, possess the draft catalogue put together by Gann; they note that it 'awaits completion' (another casualty of the very slow post-war revival of Liverpool's museums). Indeed in the joint 2005 document on *Areas of Existing and Potential Collaboration on Research and Research Dissemination*, Gann's collecting activities were proposed as 'an ideal subject' for a collaborative project between NML and the University (see: [www.liv.ac.uk/researching\\_together/Mapping\\_Exercise/UoL\\_NML\\_Mapping\\_Exercise.pdf](http://www.liv.ac.uk/researching_together/Mapping_Exercise/UoL_NML_Mapping_Exercise.pdf), accessed 11/2010).

## One Modern Problem in the Historical Study of the Practice of British Central American Archaeology

Relatively little is published on the development of collections of Latin American antiquities in British museums, to set Gann's collecting in context. Elizabeth Carmichael's good, short pen-portraits of British travellers and scholars in the Maya lands, 1830s–1970s, only incidentally mention collecting artefacts. Warwick Bray has sketched the overall haphazard way that British archaeologists worked in Latin America from the early nineteenth century onwards, before such interest fizzled out in the twentieth century (Bray & Glover 1987: 117–118). Only with Maya archaeology was there some sort of – fragile – continuity, and cumulatively the work of Gann and others here was less of a national engagement with archaeology abroad, than more 'neglectful of one of the world's great cultural and artistic traditions' (*op cit.*: 118–119).

Three main observations can be made, however. The first is around the – apparent – primacy of ancient Mexico in modern archaeological interests, in comparison with other parts of Central and South America. Aztec codices captured scholarly attention first (cf. the document histories in Berger 1998), followed by sculpture from ancient Mexico in the 1820s (Locke 2002: 80–83). The showman William Bullock, owner of London's Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly (opened 1812), made a visit to Mexico in 1823 to collect material and was the first exhibitor of Latin American antiquities in Britain (Aguirre 2005: 1–33). Later during the nineteenth century, art objects brought to Europe after the Spanish Conquest of Mexico were re-discovered and collected (Carmichael 1970: 10–11, 33–39).

The second observation is the relative lack of formal direction or collecting policies; collections were made (and sold) in casual-seeming ways. Joseph Mayer (1803–1886), whose collection came to the Liverpool Museum in 1867, acquired some pottery from Mexico and an important Aztec codex incidentally with his purchase of the Fejérváry Collection in 1855 (Gibson 1988: 11). What he was particularly interested in, were this collection's classical and medieval ivories. Other ancient Meso-American objects came to be owned by Mayer with the purchase of another collection in 1856 and were soon sold on (to the British Museum benefactor Henry Christy: Southworth 1988: 92–93; Locke 2002: 91 [note 22]). The critic Roger Fry (1866–1934) was moved to comment on the 'odd causes' of 'the magnificent collection of Mexican antiquities in the British Museum': conquerors' greed, scientific curiosity and the question of origins, 'rather than to any serious appreciation of their artistic merits. Indeed it is only in this century that, after contemplating them from every other point of view, we have begun to look at them seriously as works of art' (Fry 1918: 155–156).

Lack of links between scholars and institutions did not foster museum collecting until Gann's time, it seems. Sometimes, the development of a Latin American collection came later to be seen as outside a museum's interests. The Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, in Edinburgh, acquired Latin American material from at least the 1840s onwards, later transferring their 280 items from the National Museum of Antiquities to the Royal Scottish Museum in 1939 (Stevenson 1981: 194), while the basis for the latter institution's collection was due, in part, to the dispersal of the former Wellcome Historical Medical Museum in the 1960s (Idiens 1971: iv).

Thirdly, the lone British Maya archaeologist of the nineteenth century, Alfred Maudslay (1850–1931), was more concerned with recording and publishing sites and sculpture, than with collecting antiquities when he was active (1880s–1900s):

'it was the unexpected magnificence of the monuments which that day came into view [at Quiriguá in 1881] that led me to devote so many years to securing copies of them, which, preserved in the museums of Europe and America, are likely to survive the originals' (quoted in Graham 2002: 82).

Hence the founding collections of the University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at his

*alma mater* (Cambridge) from 1884 included plaster casts donated by him (*op cit.*: 119–120, 220, 315). Maudslay had little or no institutional connections (*op cit.*: 119, 130, 194, 214–216, 267) and had done his major object-collecting earlier and elsewhere, in Fiji in 1875–76 (*op cit.*: 46–48).

At least one grand official scheme of the 1850s focused on Central America, but it was more to do with the contemporary British fashion of removing large Classical antiquities from provinces of the declining Ottoman Empire and putting them on display. As such, Lord Palmerston's 1851 scheme for obtaining 'some specimens of the sculptures from the ruined cities of Central America' – specifically from Copán, in Honduras and Quiriguá, in Guatemala – never actually eventuated (Aguirre 2004; 2005: 61–101; Graham 2002: 79–80).

The three trends – Mexican primacy, lack of formal direction, and relative neglect of portable material culture – can arguably be seen in the development of the British Museum's collections. Aztec sculptures from Bullock's exhibition came to the British Museum in 1825 (Braunholz 1953a: 90). The development of those collections, including the activities of the Americanist keeper T. Athol Joyce (1878–1942), an acquaintance of Gann's, in the 1900s–1930s (Braunholz 1953b: 114–118) and benefactors Henry Christy (his collection was taken over in 1865, though separately housed until 1883) and Harry Beasley, is covered, to a certain extent, by Hermann Braunholz's history of ethnography in the British Museum (1953a, 1953b; Locke has expanded on this sketch, 2002: 82–83). Lack of space was the reason for the British Museum Trustees declining the offer of casts and original Maya sculptures from Maudslay in 1885 (Braunholz 1953a: 92, but see Graham 2002: 221), which instead went to the Victoria and Albert Museum (*op cit.*: 220–221, 315; Breton *et al.* 1913: lxxxiv–lxxxv). In 1923 these were transferred to the British Museum (Graham 2002: 259–261; Braunholz 1953b: 116). The ancient American collections grew extensively only in the 1920s and 1930s, with material from fieldwork in British Honduras, and from the purchase or donation of other collections, including one of Gann's (*op cit.*: 116–117).

### **The Impact of Thomas Gann in Britain – Latent and Lateral?**

With the relative lack of collections research, the biographies of some of the British collections and collectors continue to be obscure. Plenty of hints remain to be followed up. Gann was not, of course, the first to collect archaeological finds from the former British Honduras and send them back to Europe (cf. the case of the Danish Consul, Matthias Levy, in the 1860s: Nielsen and Andersen 2004). Maudslay, as President of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland in early 1912, noted that in England at that time:

'we have probably more pre-Columbian objects of interest here than any other European country. Most of these are, of course, preserved in Museums, but there are many in private hands, and we should be most grateful for any information which may enable us to trace them, as we hope to exhibit a loan collection during the session of the [Americanist] Congress at the Imperial Institute [later that year] ...' (Maudslay 1912: 22).

What actually transpired was that an exhibition was arranged for the week of the Congress (Breton *et al.* 1913: lxxi–lxxvi). It comprised mostly paintings, pictures and photographs, but also some archaeological objects; 'Ancient Peruvian pottery' lent by one of the organisers, the geographer and explorer Sir Clements Markham (1830–1916: active there in 1852–53 especially) and finds from British Guiana lent by the naturalist and colonial officer Sir Everard im Thurn (1852–1932: active there 1870s–90s) (*op cit.*: lxxv). The Blackmore Museum in Salisbury (whose founder William Blackmore [1827–1878] had acquired a very important collection of North American antiquities in 1864 (Barnhart 2004: 73–79) was visited (Breton *et al.* 1913: lxx). More of the delegates would have seen the 'Museum of Central American antiquities collected by Mr Fleischmann from Guatemala' (*ibid.*), when the latter hosted them at his home in Hampstead (this material came to the British Museum in 1930). The Conference Proceedings drew attention to a number of other collections, including Gann's in Liverpool, and two groups of material in the Bristol Museum, finds 'from excavations in British

Honduras by Dr F. C. Davis' and 'from ancient sites in Mexico' deposited by the artist and traveller Adela Breton (1849–1923) (*op cit.*: lxxxiii).

Meanwhile, the founding collection that Pitt-Rivers gave to Oxford in 1883 (begun in the 1850s) had only 8% of its objects from the Americas, broadly-defined, as opposed to 58% from Europe, and 14% from 'Asia' (Africa and Oceania having comparable representation to the Americas: Gosden *et al.* 2007: Fig 5.7). However, by the time that the 'American' objects were surveyed in 1945, it seems that they contained a significant amount of archaeological material, in addition to the definitive weapons and tools that dominated every regional grouping, in particular these comprised grave-goods from South America, especially from Peru (*op cit.*: 206).

At Cambridge, Louis Clarke (1881–1960) retained his honorary keepership of the American Collections in the University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, even after his move to the Fitzwilliam Museum in 1937. He had first travelled to Central and South America in 1906 and had taken part in excavations at Kechipaun, New Mexico in 1923 (*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* 12 [2004]: 894).

The Royal Scottish Museum noted, as the third major component of its collection of Ancient American material, 'a number of acquisitions formerly belonging to the Cowdray Collection' (Idiens 1971: iv). What were they? This must relate to the collection of British businessman Weetman Pearson, 1st Viscount Cowdray (1856–1927), who had Mexico at the epicentre of his international business empire; the British Museum bought Cowdray objects at auction ca. 1946 (Locke 2002: 82 & 91 [note 7]). Gann may also have done some collecting for the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum, when Henry Wellcome (1853–1926) was building it up one of the world's largest museum collections during the 1900s. Certainly one of the dispersed Wellcome items that came to the Pitt-Rivers Museum in 1985 was a horse-shaped obsidian amulet from Mexico given to the Wellcome by Gann in 1934 (1985.49.16, according to the Pitt-Rivers Museum's objects database, *databases.prm.ox.ac.uk*, accessed 10/2010).

Set against all of this background, however difficult to see, it is quite possible that the first Gann collection, languishing in obscurity in Liverpool for far too long, might hang together as more representative and less curious (or small-scale) than some other collections, and as such complements Maudslay's cast records of ceremonial art and architecture, and the field material acquired by Joyce for the British Museum. Assuming, of course, that Gann's collecting related to his published fieldwork between the 1890s until the 1910s in burial mounds especially.

However the material in the Gann/Liverpool collection may be too poorly provenanced, in comparison to modern standards, to be useful. Gann's accounts of his fieldwork during the 1890s until the 1930s, are known to be difficult to relate to the actual sites (cf. Hammond 1985: 43–44, 49–56, 115–166). The current lack of information about the content and contexts of the first Gann collection is another reason why modern accounts of the history of archaeology, when assessing Gann, depend entirely on his not-very-detailed published works. I can only reiterate Jonathan Reyman when he wrote years ago that: 'owing to the limitations of the published literature, there is a demonstratable need for a thorough examination of unpublished materials' (Reyman 1989: 42), while being aware that the results may be disappointing.

However, despite all the difficulties we currently encounter in trying to research and discuss the specifics of the development of early British Central American archaeology, something new has emerged about the way that Belizean archaeology was being exploited back in the U. K. in the 1900s.

We can see that Gann was hardly a British, university, ancestor, of those Latin American specialists working in London and elsewhere from the 1960s. Chiefly valued for his collection and his fieldwork, Gann taught no classes, supervised no students, and he was not expected to. With the active

connection via the Liverpool University and Institute back to Britain being so short, from 1908 until 1914, Gann's post says as much about the atmosphere of the early years at Liverpool University as it does about the study of Ancient America in Britain. For Gann himself, the new American monopoly of his field of operations, arguably only meant that his old title of 'lecturer' at Liverpool University would still have been very useful to him after 1914, and we have already seen that Liverpool optimistically kept him 'on the books' well into the 1930s, despite the limitations of his fieldwork during this period.

### **Instead, an Aspect of University/Disciplinary History**

The new Liverpool Institute's objectives had been clearly set out in its *Preliminary Prospectus* for the University Session 1904–05:

'It will be the object of this Committee to secure specialist teaching in the various branches of Archaeology, to encourage research upon ancient sites, to provide collections of antiquities selected and arranged with a view to illustrating the principles of Archaeology and to be of direct use in the teaching of History, Classics, Architecture and the Applied Arts, and other allied subjects'.

Then, the year 1906 saw the creation of three new Chairs in Archaeology: the Rankin Chair of the Methods and Practice of Archaeology, a Chair of Classical Archaeology, and the Brunner Chair of Egyptology, within the University of Liverpool Institute of Archaeology (itself only founded in 1904), part of the expansion of research and teaching at an institution that had itself begun to evolve only a little more than twenty years before (Kelly 1981: chapters 2 & 3). Within a few years, an honorary Chair of Medieval Archaeology had been found for the numismatist Francis Pierrepont Barnard (1854–1931), who came to Liverpool in retirement in 1908 from the Headmastership of Reading School. Teaching has also been arranged in Assyriology, by T. G. Pinches (1856–1934), ex-British Museum, from 1906, and in Classical Geography, by the Professor of Greek, J. L. Myres (1869–1954), from 1907–10. The final 'department' of the Institute, Numismatics, had a new lecturer in 1906, when Joseph Grafton Milne (1867–1951) arrived. Milne's post was analogous to Gann's, in that while he was a prolific researcher on Roman Egypt, and the Ptolemaic and the Alexandrian coinages, he also worked as a civil servant at the Board of Education, and did not teach at, or spend much time in, Liverpool. The association of his scholarship with the Institute was the prized item, rather than much direct work for it.

While some of the passing archaeological opportunities seized by John Garstang (1876–1956) and his colleagues at the Liverpool Institute prospered, such as e.g., Garstang's own new fieldwork, away from Egypt, in the Sudan and Anatolia) others, such as the Gann connection to the archaeology of Central America, did not.

But overall, the subjects developed in Britain's then new, civic universities can be revealing. The late Jackson Walsh studied the attitude of the Victorian British State to the University Movement in the north of England in the late nineteenth century (Walsh 2009). His work sheds some light on the reality behind the statement about the University of Liverpool in the new regional, Victoria County History:

'the greatest developments have been in the field of advanced research in pure arts and science. Several chairs exist exclusively for the encouragement of research. Perhaps the most astonishing result of the establishment of the university has been the institution, in a trading town, of the most powerfully-organized school of archaeology in Britain, a school which possesses three endowed chairs, has got together admirable teaching collections, and has organized expeditions for the excavation of sites in Egypt, Central America, and Asia Minor' (Muir, in Farrer and Brownbill 1911: 54).

Although universities like Liverpool were part of a national movement for change, following Great

Britain's poor performance at the Paris Exhibition of 1867, the subjects taught and examined in them were not wholly technological and commercial in nature. Walsh drew attention to Privy Council discussions during the development of the charters for the new universities at Liverpool and Manchester, the papers recording:

‘a strong feeling among some of those who are interested in the introduction of new subjects that there are serious risks involved if subjects of mainly technical importance come into competition with pure science for a place in the degree courses, and that a higher standard is likely to be maintained by the introduction of some new and distinct name which would have to establish its reputation and its value in the eyes of the public, in case technical and commercial subjects became the most prominent feature in some of the courses leading to a degree’ (Walsh 2009: 127, quoting a document of April 1903).

Thus, aside from the correction that I can offer about exactly when Thomas Gann's British university connection really was active, what elucidation we gain from the archival sources used here is not so much about the history of archaeology in Belize (or another colonialist archaeological episode in Latin America) as about the early years of Archaeology at Liverpool University, where they were making it up as they went along, and taking advantage of any opportunity for empire-building that came along. What connected the active fieldwork and reputations of Liverpool's Garstang, Bosanquet, Myres and Newberry, with the different areas represented by the collection of Gann and the researches of Barnard and Milne, was a desire to introduce ‘some new and distinct [subject] which would have to establish its reputation and its value in the eyes of the public’, through efforts to ‘secure specialist teaching. ... to encourage research ... [and] to provide collections of antiquities’.

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