

Living With Old Things: Iñupiaq Stories, Bering Strait Histories



Written by Amber Lincoln - with John Goodwin, Pearl Goodwin,
Faye Ongtowasruk, Ron Senungetuk, Barbara Weyiouanna

Acknowledgements

This project is the result of the combined efforts and diverse skills of many individuals and institutions. To the heritage advisors who bravely traveled to England to document the Bering Strait museum collections in Great Britain, Faye Ongtowsruk, Barbara Weyiouanna, Pearl and John Goodwin, Ron and Turid Senungetuk; to all the people who offered interpretations about the HMS *Blossom*/Bering Strait collection within Alaska, especially Willie Goodwin, Lela Oman and Vince Pikonganna; to the logistics coordinators, the Native Village of Kotzebue, IRA, and, in particular, Alex Whiting, environmental specialist for the tribe; to our overall hosts and facilitators within Great Britain; the staff at the British Museum, especially, Jonathan King; to the museum employees who facilitated our collections visit; Jonathan King, Robert Storrie and Ian Taylor of the British Museum, Laura Peers and Marina de Alarcon of the Pitt Rivers Museum, and Henrietta Lidchi of National Museums Scotland; to Takashi Sakurai and Birgit Pauksztat who filmed and helped facilitate the museum visits; and to the many people in Alaska, England, or somewhere in between who helped out in vital ways including: Marge Baker, John Bockstoce, Kevin Bopp, Lynn DeFilippo, Karlin Itchoak, and Arash Pessian – I sincerely thank you.

None of this would have been possible without the generous sponsorship from the following organizations: the United States National Park Service's Shared Beringian Heritage Program; the Native Village of Kotzebue IRA; Kawerak, Inc.; the Thaw Charitable Trust, Santa Fe; Bering Straits Native Foundation, and the British Museum.

John Goodwin, Faye Ongtowsruk,
Ron Senungetuk examining mammoth
ivory chain at the Pitt Rivers Museum.



Contents

HMS Blossom/Bering Strait Artifact Collection.....	1
The Project: Exchanging Stories and Knowledge.....	2
<i>Methodology: Discussing Photographs, Consulting Artifacts</i>	
<i>Themes of the Report: Knowledge, Relationships, Identity</i>	
Knowledge and Skills of the Artifact Makers.....	7
<i>Knowing Materials</i>	
<i>Economic and Balanced Materials</i>	
<i>Design and Technology</i>	
<i>Innovation</i>	
The Relationships Surrounding Tools and Clothing	22
<i>Working Together to Make Tools</i>	
<i>Caring for Clothing and People</i>	
<i>Made to Measure</i>	
<i>Sharing Handles and Transforming Tools</i>	
<i>Remembering People and Places</i>	
<i>Relationships with Animals</i>	
Identities Associated with Tools and Garments	35
<i>Regional Identity</i>	
<i>Personal Identity</i>	
Work Accomplished.....	40
Our Hope.....	42
About the Authors.....	42
Works Cited	44

HMS *Blossom*/Bering Strait Artifact Collection



Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

There is a collection of tools and clothing in three British museums that are some of the oldest Iñupiaq ethnographic objects in the world. These objects include hunting tools like harpoons, lances and bows; processing tools, such as hide scrapers, ulus and needle cases; and clothing, footwear and containers.

The artifacts were collected in 1826-27 when the British Naval ship, HMS *Blossom*, entered the Bering Strait and subsequently anchored in Kotzebue Sound. The voyage was part of a joint effort to find the fabled Northwest Passage. While the ship was in northwest Alaska, Iñupiaq traders approached and then boarded the ship to exchange Bering Strait Eskimo tools, clothing and food for European iron, beads, copper kettles and tobacco. Once they returned to Great Britain, at different times and through various routes, the British officers including Captain Frederick William Beechey and Lieutenant Edward Belcher presented the objects to the British Museum in London (BM), the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford (PRM), and National Museums Scotland in Edinburgh (NMS).

The HMS *Blossom*/Bering Strait collection is one of the largest and oldest Iñupiaq ethnographic collections in the world. The artifacts document artistic traditions and technology of the early 19th century Bering Strait and serve as an important legacy of Iñupiaq cultural heritage. Furthermore, the artifacts act as tangible documents and evidence for the cross-cultural interactions between ancestral Iñupiat and British Naval officers that took place 180 years ago.

Middle sections of Iñupiaq harpoons if the British Museum.

The Project: Exchanging Stories and Knowledge

The three museums in Great Britain have safely stored the artifacts for almost two centuries. Museum personnel have used their particular skills to document the collections; most often this entailed learning information from the objects themselves, including their size and shape, functions and the materials they are made from. They have also attempted to trace the general region from which the objects originated, the Europeans who collected them and the movement and display of the artifacts since their presence in Great Britain.

By safely storing away historic artifact collections for posterity, all museums confront two major problems. First, to preserve artifacts for centuries, museums must limit exposure of the objects. This, in turn, limits learning important interpretations of the artifacts from people of various backgrounds. Most notably in this case, the BM, PRM, and NMS did not know many of the contemporary Iñupiaq meanings and interpretations of this historic collection. Second, securing historic artifacts in foreign countries hinders descendants of the objects original makers from knowing and using their cultural heritage. Despite the historic significance of the HMS *Blossom*/Bering Strait collection, few Iñupiat have examined the artifacts or used the information that is tied up in the objects.

This project, guided by previous museum collaborative programs, creatively attempted to resolve these two problems. The major objective was to expose Iñupiaq people to this particular part of their cultural heritage and to fill the gap of Iñupiaq knowledge within museum records. We have documented surrounding and vitally important Iñupiaq knowledge that is entangled in a single object and recorded interpretations about how these historical tools and clothing fit into the life histories of contemporary Iñupiat.

They're looking for [our] story, not the collectors' stories. [We've] got to make that story... it's for us to correct the misunderstandings about these things. [The museums] didn't know where they [the



Ron Senungetuk and Faye Ongtowasruk

artifacts] came from and we should be here to give our version of what we think [the story] is...for today and tomorrow...your job, our job.

—Ron Senungetuk

Like the historic interaction between ancestral Iñupiat and British officers, this project and report details an exchange. It merges the historic information about these artifacts that British museums have gathered and scholars have written about with local Iñupiaq knowledge and perspectives of old tools and clothing.

Methodology: Discussing Photographs, Consulting Artifacts

As part of my postgraduate research, I photographed this collection at the British Museum and the Pitt Rivers Museum. I then spent one year in northwest Alaska sharing the images of the historic artifacts with residents of Kotzebue, Nome, Wales and Point Hope. The photographs elicited stories of and experiences with historic things from residents of northwest Alaska. Quite often these visits led to carvers guiding me to their workshops and showing me their equivalent tools. Similarly, seamstresses often grabbed unfinished projects or hides from backrooms in order to tangibly demonstrate processing techniques to me.



In January 2008, with the help of many agencies and individuals, five Iñupiaq heritage advisors traveled to Great Britain to document the collection in person at the British Museum (BM) and the Pitt Rivers Museum (PRM). The Native Village of Kotzebue, IRA chose John and Pearl Goodwin from Kotzebue for the task. The Regional Kawerak Elders Association nominated Faye Ongtowsruk from Wales, who, requested the assistance of her daughter, Barbara Weyiouanna, for the trip. The five of us traveled to London where we met Ron and Turid Senungetuk from Homer and originally Wales and Norway, who join the documentation visit.

We spent two days in the storage facility of the BM, one day at the PRM research room, and another day viewing photographs of artifacts held at the National Museums Scotland (NMS). In the storage facilities of the BM and PRM, we documented roughly 100 artifacts by focusing on one at a time. The Iñupiaq advisors picked up the tools, imitated their uses in order to feel their textures and edges, measure their weight and experience their balance. For many objects and their parts, Iñupiaq speakers recorded terminology in both Malimiut dialect (M) (Kotzebue Sound and Kobuk region) and Bering Strait dialect (BS) (Bering Strait region). (Please note that the spellings have not been standardized uniformly). The process was filmed and later transcribed. I then compiled this information with the recorded stories and interpretations from my interviews with residents of northwest Alaska.

NANA Regional Elders Association meeting, Kotzebue, 2007.
Photo by Robyn Westlake.



Pearl Goodwin points to the hood of a fawn skin parka at the British Museum.

Focusing on old tools and clothing with Iñupiaq heritage advisors generated conversations that illuminated the significance of this historic collection. The objects reminded people of stories and experiences from their own lives; they were departure points for people to remember and share stories that highlighted favors family members had bestowed upon others, narratives that emphasized proper behavior towards family and friends and explanations of techniques for teaching and learning new skills. Viewing the objects also encouraged peoples to relay their own diverse experiences and knowledge of hunting, traveling, making tools, sewing, processing food and raising children. Delicately enmeshed within a single Iñupiaq tool are moments of shared labor and entertainment; of harvesting, processing, and fabricating skill and knowledge; and of daily engagements between people, animals and materials from land and sea. This project and report is an attempt to capture many of those moments; to highlight the significance that these objects – as reminders of one's life and history – serve for people today.



John Goodwin, Pearl, Barbara Weyiouanna, Amber Lincoln, Faye, Ron, Pitt Rivers Museum student, and Turid Senungetuk at the Pitt Rivers Museum.

By working together the Iñupiaq heritage advisors who documented the collections in person built off of each other's knowledge and memories.

We're solving problems...we're flexible. When your trying to tell something yourself, you seem to forget a little short part of it, and it is crucial for that little piece. If [they] see something, [they] can mention it, and I can mention something [that I see] and that way we can accomplish more.

—John Goodwin

These conversations stem from diverse personal and lived experiences. As an example, during a conversation about men's hunting tools, Barbara



emphasized that she doesn't know how harpoons are used because she doesn't hunt. Rather she knows how to feed people once the animals are brought home.

When my husband uses the tools, I don't see when they get it or when it's in the water, 'til it comes home. That's my view. When you get seal, you've got blubber, you've got your meat and you've got to take care of it from spoiling, and later on you've got people who go with mixing bowl and say, "give me some"...you know that part of it is from me. I don't go hunting for the food, I work on the meat, I don't really see how they are used, but I wonder how many people these tools already fed. The nutritional part of the animal... I wonder how many people it affected. I got that question deep inside me and I say thank you to these tools because they fed somebody...somebody we didn't know. That's my insight, very nutritious. This gave somebody food and helped them survive.

—Barbara Weyiouanna

Together each perspective added to a larger history and a greater understanding of the motivations, skills, and livelihoods of the makers of these enduring artifacts.

John, Amber, and Turid at the British Museum.

Themes of the Report: Knowledge, Relationships, Identity

This report represents a selection from the informative conversations and eloquent stories told that took place at the British museums with John and Pearl Goodwin of Kotzebue, Faye Ongtowsruk and Barbara Weyiouanna of Wales and Ron and Turid Senungetuk of Wales and Norway and in Alaska with Kotzebue, Wales, Nome and Point Hope residents. This report is organized around three themes that continued to surface during these discussions and narratives and include:

- 1) the knowledge and skill encapsulated within each artifact,
- 2) the social relationships surrounding each object, and
- 3) personal and regional identity displayed by the historic tools and clothing.

The text prioritizes these themes, but I have tried to maintain the integrity of the conversations so various topics crop up throughout the report. Museum documentation is included for each object. It is important to remember that the museum documentation was gathered many years ago under various conditions, so readers should always suspect its accuracy.



Iñupiaq tools of the HMS *Blossom*/Bering Strait artifact collection at the British Museum: eye goggles, mukluk sole, and harpoon section.

Photos courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

Knowledge and Skill of the Artifact Makers

All of us marveled at the knowledge and skill tied up in a single object. Not only did the tools' makers know how to obtain the materials by hunting, gathering or trading, but they also understood the qualities of raw materials, how they interacted with other material and how they were affected by cold, wet or dry weather conditions. They knew the time of year to harvest materials and when to process them. The practitioners gauged how long it took for the fur and the epidermis layer to rot off sealskin, and the conditions for sea mammal gut and grass to dry mildew-free. When the museum advisors saw these tools they often relayed stories about mistakes in judgments of materials and the severe consequences of these miscalculations.

Knowing Materials

It is hard to imagine that the delicate, brittle, and folded pile of sewn walrus or bearded seal intestine was once a durable sail, *tuugauraq* (M). The sail in the museum is stiffly folded twice and since unfolding it would tear the object, we could only guess that it is about 10' x 10'. Intestine is water-proof, flexible, and durable but only under the proper care and conditions. "Even people who used gut rain parkas remember how they had to be cared for to make them last. They were something special," Ron said.

In order for the sail to retain its flexibility and not rip when in use, Faye explained how the delicate material was conserved and made durable, "Like they do with rain parkas, they might oil them...seal oil is good for lots of things."

John added:

They would role them up and put them away. [They] kept them damp by rolling. They probably had a different pouch of their own. Because if I was going to put one on and it start tearing up on me, when I get home, I say lady you work on this, I don't want it tearing up on me when I got to put it on. So they figure things out. They keep them moist.

Gut sail BM1828.12-13.13

Material: Sea mammal intestine, sinew
Field Collector: Frederick William Beechey
Museum: The British Museum



Knowing the amount of effort involved in caring for the sail, the Iñupiaq advisors tried to imagine where its original owners intended to travel with it.

John *They're real delicate sails, they've got to really be interested in going from point A to point B.*

Ron *Yea, like interested in going from Wales to Kotzebue!*

John *It's not for just going from little village to little village, I think it's [for] long distance. Because what they do down the coast if they're going from village to village, they just let the dogs or the people pull, tow the boat. [They] wait for good weather. But they use this for sailing over, sailing across.*



Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

Gut sail BM1828.12-13.13
 Material: Sea mammal intestine, sinew
 Field Collector: Frederick William Beechey
 Museum: The British Museum



Sewing *ijaluat*, intestine, or *ijaluk*, dried sea mammal intestine, also requires particular care and skill. When Pearl tried to sew gut, she explained that she had to keep moistening the seams while she worked. "You can't sew it while it is dry, it will just tear – you have to moisten, sew, moisten, sew".

The sail and the two raincoats, *silanṇaaq* (M) (singular) are both sewn with waterproof stitching. The bearded seal or walrus strips of intestine are doubled-over at their edges, and sewn together with sinew. Along the yoke and shoulders of one of the raincoats there is a reinforced stitch sewn with a smooth and shiny, darker fiber, perhaps beluga sinew, Faye suggested. Anna Gologregen from Savoonga mentioned that the dark color might be the result of dye. On Saint Lawrence Island, women dyed sea mammal sinew with soot or graphite.

The seams of the raincoat on the following page are sewn on the outside, while the parka on the right has inside seams. Beda Sloowka, from Savoonga, identified outside seams with men's raincoats and inside seams with women's rain parkas. While viewing the parkas at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Faye too thought the parka with the inside seams was a woman's parka because of the triangle darts under the chin, at the sides of the chest and on the back of the neck. Ron suggested that these decorative elements were wolf fish skin. Sealskin hide reinforces the cuffs, hood and hem of both parkas and a sinew drawstring is strung through the hood.



Gut parka 1886.1.655

Material: Sea mammal intestines, sinew, sealskin
Field Collector: Frederick William Beechey
Museum: The Pitt Rivers Museum
Museum Records: "Duncan Catalogue entry - 331 2 shirts made from the intestines of the walrus, worn by the Esquimaux of Kotzebue Sound (Capt. Beechey). List of Anthropological objects transferred from the Ashmolean to the Pitt Rivers' museum 1886. "





Gut parka 1886.1.654

Material: Sea mammal intestines, sinew, sealskin

Field Collector: Frederick William Beechey

Museum: The Pitt Rivers Museum

Museum Records: "Duncan Catalogue entry
- 331 2 shirts made from the intestines of
the walrus, worn by the Esquimaux of
Kotzebue Sound (Capt. Beechey). List of
Anthropological objects transferred from the
Ashmolean to the Pitt Rivers' museum 1886."

**Intestine scraper
1886.1.750 (right)**

Material: Mammoth ivory
Field Collector: F. W. Beechey
Museum: The Pitt Rivers Museum

8231 (below)

Material: Mammoth Ivory
Field Collector: Edward Belcher
Museum: The British Museum
Museum Records: "Point Hope,
small bowl with human and
seal's heads at one end carved
out of mammoth ivory.
Belcher coll 268 Pres.
10/6/72 by A.W. Franks"



Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

From the photograph, many Iñupiat thought these items were bowls or ladles. Winton Weyapuk of Wales said that the object reminded him of a *Kayutaq*, traveling bowl. The original and historic museum records also indicate that both items are bowls. These objects may have had many uses but their small size (roughly four inches long and one inch deep) suggests a use in addition to a bowl. Similar looking tools have been identified as scrapers for final bits of fat from hides (Murdock 1892: 299, Bockstoce 1977: 77, and Nelson 1983: 118, Belcher 1861). Based on interviews with residents of Point Hope, Birgit Foote identified this kind of tool as an intestine scraper. She writes that although today women carefully scrape the sides of the *injaluat* with a tablespoon, "there used to be a special tool for such scraping ... called a" *iluiqsisiun*, which was ivory or bone and scoop-shaped (1992: 66). She highlights that the tool resembles one that was collected by Edward Nelson in the late 19th century (1983: plate L, fig 8). The strong but blunt edge would gently remove the contents of the intestines and the tissue lining both the inside and outside of the intestines without tearing the gut.

Faye watched her grandmother prepare intestines to make rain coats and windows for the sod house. She scraped the intestines with a tablespoon to remove the white layer of tissue. Her grandmother, Faye told us, "let us kids eat the white stuff [tissue lining the gut] as it was scraped off".

Faye learned to both use the food and raw materials from different harvests. Iñupiaq knowledge of making tools and processing materials is holistic. Iñupiaq artists and practitioners learn the potential of the harvested materials: their products and by-products, for food and fabrication.

Sinew

Like intestine, *ivalu*, sinew, too is an essential product. The heritage advisors discussed not only its many uses but how it was obtained and used with other materials. Although women typically process and sew with sinew, John pointed out that men hunt the animal from which the sinew is taken. Hunters carefully choose animals for their superior sinew as well as for their meat.

Sinew [is] different in all areas. [There is] beluga, grey whale, caribou, each animal's got sinew and they utilize all the sinew for their garments so when they get an animal, every animal that has sinew, they preserve [it]. That's their sewing material, it's as important as any of the skin – the sinew part. The hunters save the sinew... so, when you get an animal [when you go hunting] you look for sinew also.

—John Goodwin

Because it is more durable and flexible, seamstresses prefer reindeer to caribou sinew and hide. After reindeer were brought to Alaska in the late 1800s they mixed with the caribou populations. Elders explain that the resulting caribou herds today are a hybrid stock. Hunters like Wilfred Lane and John Goodwin look for animals with more reindeer traits (shorter legs, fuller bodies, and smaller antlers) because they perceive the meat as more tender and they want to provide their wives with superior material. During this conversation, we also discussed whether it is necessary to use land animal sinew with land animal hide and sea mammal sinew with sea mammal hides. Faye replied that they can combine the two and that Iñupiat, in the past, used what was available.

Faye, Takashi Sakurai,
videographer, Ron, and John at
the British Museum.

John *They utilize what they can find, what they have at stock. If hunters are in a hurry to where they can't save the sinew, they have to use the caribou. And sometimes they can't because of the ice conditions, you gotta scram... it's just every day livelihood stuff that you got to be careful, and then you utilize other type of sinew, but they prefer sea mammal with sea mammal hide. Caribou sinew will get tight and keep its own form when [it is used] with gut, whereas, a beluga or whale, or probably seal, are durable and flexible [because of its] origin in salt water.*

Ron *Yea, the [hide and sinew] won't fight each other. Wales's people use beluga sinew on umiaq – only beluga sinew.*



Economic and Balanced Materials

Upon first handling and viewing the tools and clothing, many of us were struck by the uniform balance and precision of the objects. The artifacts demonstrate an economy of material and carry no excess weight. The raw materials that compose the artifacts sit well with one another. Historically, materials were not always readily available and so carvers and seamstresses carefully calculated what material was necessary for the tool to perform its task. Furthermore, their economy facilitated light travel and smooth mobility. This value of precise use of materials was not just represented in Iñupiaq tools. According to Commander Beechey of HMS *Blossom*, Iñupiaq verbalized this value as well. In 1826, Kingikmuit, Wales's residents, boarded and examined the ship in Kotzebue Sound. Although they were generally impressed with the ship, the Kingikmuit verbally poked fun at the officers for their unnecessary use of heavy metal chains when leather thongs could have adequately worked (Beechey 1832: 291).

Several examples of crooked knives demonstrate Iñupiaq economical use of materials. Crooked knives, *mitliñ* (singular), are an essential tool for the completion of any wooden object. They shape bowls, sled runners, boat spines, and utensils. Vince Pikonganna of Nome and originally King Island, explained that carvers also use crooked knives to make the inside rim of a drum concave shaped so that the sound travels outward.

This crooked knife (below) has a bone handle wrapped in spruce root. A thin and curved piece of metal forms the blade. Like many of the tools in the collection, the handle of the scraper perfectly balances in one's hand. The spruce root both widens the circumference of the grip and



Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

Crooked Knife 8223 (right) A similar knife at the BM (above)

Material: Bone, spruce root, metal

Field Collector: Edward Belcher

Museum: The British Museum

Museum Records: "Eskimo Cape Beaufort.

Cutting tool (scraper?) small hoop inserted into a groove in edge of one end of bone handle - binding of bark partly bored hole. (Belcher coll Lot 302) Pres. by AW Franks 10-6-72." "Obtained at Point Beaufort (Cape)"



Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

makes it smoother than the rough and porous bone. Although crooked knives are commonly used by carvers today, Ron marveled at the small amount of iron used for this tool; "A real *misig* when the iron was so scarce." The knife's maker was both innovative and conservative with materials.

Many Iñupiaq people recalled their father's skill and agility with these tools. John and Ron emphasized how carvers mastered their skill by devoting time to carving.

John *They had the time and imagination we don't have. We've got no time to think – our world is in a rush. They planned ahead... it was all about weather.*

Ron *They carved during storms so that bad weather wasn't wasted.*

John *That was a favorite pastime for them, Eskimo carving. When they are just sitting, they carve, they do a lot of talking, every time you*

*go to someone's house, they're carving something, fork, spoon...
When the weather's nice, they stayed outside.*

In addition to re-using materials, Iñupiaq innovation also includes re-fashioning broken objects into new tools. Both of these ivory net gauges, according to collector Lieutenant Belcher, come "from the neighborhood of Icy Cape". The top gauge is fairly large and is perhaps for making seal or even beluga nets. The smaller gauge is unusual because it has several knobs along the handle. Some people suggested they are finger holds, others thought that the different knobs offered alternative sizes to make nets. A third explanation for the knobs was that the carver used a scrap piece of ivory from another project and thus it already had cuts in it. There are several examples of gauges made from broken sled runners and ice sieve rims in other collections. (see Morrison 1991: 51, plate 11 d and e).



Net Gauges

8234

Material: Ivory

Field Collector: Edward Belcher

Museum: The British Museum

Museum Records: "Flat, knife shaped implement of walrus ivory, curved sideways, projection at end, rounded edges (Belcher coll. Lot 267. Pres. by AW Franks 10/6/1872" "Sir Edward Belcher says it is a netting gauge. From neighbourhood of Icy Cape"

8235

Material: Ivory

Field Collector: Edward Belcher

Museum: The British Museum

Museum Records: "Flat implement of walrus ivory -- hole through base of blade; series of projections on side of handle - 8 notches on handle. Belcher coll. Lot 264. Pres. by AW Franks 10-6-1872."

"Sir Edward says these are netting gauges, the projections being guides for the size of the meshes. Neighbourhood of Icy Cape"

In addition to their balanced economy, many of these very functional tools are beautifully decorated. A seal club, *karuun* or *anaulaun* (M), made from spruce wood has a groove down the center, like many of the long tools. Baleen strips lash the club to the handle through two holes. The maul end is carved from walrus jaw to create, according to Ron, “a classic Wales’ polar bear form” with inset baleen eyes, ears, nostrils, and possibly labrets. There are holes at the cheeks, which may have been inset with whiskers.

As a sculpture it's so beautiful. [The makers] sensed the strength of the wood, [and] understood the material. The tools don't carry extra weight, it is strong enough – does its objective – but is not too heavy duty. All of these [tools] are just right for human-beings.

—Ron Senungetuk

Very similar seal clubs or brainers are found in the Bruce Collection from Port Clarence (VanStone 1976), which suggests that this club too originates around the tip of the Seward Peninsula.



Seal Club 8271

Material: Driftwood, sea mammal bone, baleen, seal hide

Field Collector: Edward Belcher

Museum: The British Museum

Museum Records: Registrar book reads: “Piece of walrus tusk carved into bear’s head, fastened to pine wood handle, grooved along the 2 sides with whalebone. No 26 Seal club. Belcher coll. 265 pres. 10/6/1872 by AW Franks.” Record card reads: “They hit the seal on the nose.”



Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

Sewing kits

8213 (right)

Material: Ivory, sealskin, chert? flint?

Field Collector: Edward Belcher

Museum: The British Museum

Museum Records: "Walrus ivory tube ornamented with engraved dots, hid thong with European steel needle stuck in it; pieces, single hook, double hook, of walrus ivory, a wetstone. Belcher Coll. lot 289. Pres. by AW Franks 10/6/1872"



Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

8212 (below)

Material: Ivory, flint?, glass beads, sealskin

Field Collector: Edward Belcher

Museum: The British Museum

Museum Records: "Woman's sewing apparatus: tube of walrus ivory inlaid with pale blue glass beads and leather thong: flat ivory hook, wet stone, lower end broken (Belcher coll lot 289) pres. by AW Franks 10-6-72"

Iñupiaq and Yup'ik sewing kits epitomize the economy and thoughtfulness of Eskimo ingenuity with materials. These sewing kits, historically, secured precious metal or fragile bone needles, kept a seamstress's tools in one place and were attached to a woman's belt for light and agile transport. A sealskin cord connects to an ivory cap, passes through the ivory tube – to which needles, stuck into the cord, are protected. Luke Kunuk from Point Hope relayed that his grandmother said that every village had their own style of sewing kit and the needle case-tubes were often made from large duck or bald eagle wing or leg bones. Pulling on the cap uncovers the needles from the tube. The cord then secures sewing tools to the bottom of the needle case, such as small ulus, awls, whetstones for sharpening needles and single or double hooks.



Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

These hooks have widely been described by scholars as thimble holders or pendant hooks to fasten the needle case to a workbag (Nelson 1983: 109, Murdock 1892, Bockstoce 1977). It is apparent that these small hooks held thimbles and fastened workbags but these functions occurred when the seamstress was not sewing, when her thimble was stored within the kit or when her kit was attached shut to her work bag. The care, precision and general uniformity of the small hooks suggests that they had additional functions. Although, few Iñupiat remembered seeing sewing kits in use, John suggested an additional use for them. He thought that the hooks might have been used to scrape off residue from pre-rolled sinew. Ross Schaeffer of Kotzebue believed the hooks attached to small pieces of material, which corresponded to the collector's insights. Years after he collected the sewing kits from Alaska, Belcher wrote that the hooks' "use is not only to retain the work steady, but also to retain temporarily any fresh object of interest until it be transferred to the company of other 'charms' " (1861: 141).

Design and Technology

The ingenious manipulation of diverse techniques and materials to make tools and clothing for severe climates demonstrates the innovation of the Iñupiat. In some cases, Iñupiaq design and technology was so perfect that it withstood the test of time. Skin scrapers, *Ikuun* (M) (singular), commonly found in modern households and camps in northwest Alaska are almost identical to the historic scrapers in museum collections. This scraper has a pine wooden handle with perfectly carved grooves to fit a thumb (at the side), two fingers (along the top) and a handle to wrap the remaining two fingers around the tool. The gray-black flint blade is inserted into a horizontal slot. In place of flint blades, carvers and tool makers today use salvage metal pipes and broken rods. Likewise, they often collect and store in their workshop or *qanitchaq*, house entryway, premium pieces of driftwood and bones for future scraper or other projects.

Similarly, this ice sieve, or *mitinjun* resembles the metal ice sieves used today for ice fishing and crabbing. The wooden handle, like the seal club, is engraved with a vertical line. A curved caribou antler forms the rim of the sieve, which is sewn together with sealskin straps while baleen, woven in a standard star shape, makes the mesh. Based on discussions with people from Wales and Nome, carvers from Little Diomedé were well known for making ice sieves.

Ice Sieve 1828.12.13.16 (right)

Material: caribou antler, baleen, driftwood, sealskin

Field Collector: F. W. Beechey

Museum: The British Museum

Museum Record: Handwritten note: "Landing net used by the Esquimaux for small fish - Kotzebue Sound"

Skin Scraper 8219 (below)

Material: Driftwood, flint or chert?

Field Collector: Edward Belcher

Museum: The British Museum

Museum Records: "Plane, wood handle, deep depressions for thumb and four fingers, square cutter of dark grey flint ? with tang?; both faces smooth 5 1/2 and flat with polish. (Belcher Coll Lot 30) Pres: 10/6/72 by AW Franks"



Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum



Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum



While many forms of technology largely remain in use among Iñupiat, there are some forms that have become entirely replaced. Few people had personal experience with bows and their associated technology such as arrows and arrow shaft straighteners. Regular trade of firearms opened in northwest Alaska by the 1880s and so, fewer people had ever seen bows in use.

This sinew-backed complex bow is probably made of spruce driftwood. It appears to be one piece of wood and like a similar bow at the Pitt Rivers Museum described by John Bockstoe is strengthened at the “elbows” with either antler or ivory chocks. Willie Goodwin from Kotzebue explained that the chocks were often made from rib or other flexible bones. The wood of the bow is dyed with red ochre or alder bark. Sinew is wrapped longitudinally along the ends and then around the bow from one elbow to the next. The pull string of this picture is vegetal material and was probably placed upon the bow after its arrival to Great Britain. When used, the string would also be pulled in the opposite direction in order to add force.

Everyone who has written about or worked with bows comments upon their endless needs for fixing and adjusting. Because sinew stretches when wet and wood also expands and shrinks with altering humidity, men were constantly adjusting their bows according to the animals they were pursuing, and the weather and atmospheric conditions (Bockstoe 1977: 20, Murdock, Burch 2006: 233). The sinew is wrapped into cord sections which were tightened with marlin spikes and sinew twisting rods in order to adjust the tension on the string of the bow. Because of this, men had a keen understanding of humidity and other weather conditions. Their tinkering with their hunting tools followed changes in weather and seasonal patterns.



Bow 96.444

Material: driftwood, sinew, bone

Field Collector: Frederick William Beechey?

Museum: The British Museum

Museum Records: “Eskimo

Purchased: Christy Fund

[United Service Institution]”



Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

Arrow Shaft Straightener 8228, Flint knapper 8241 (right)

Material: ivory, glass beads, mammoth ivory, antler, sinew

Field Collector: Edward Belcher

Museum: The British Museum

Museum Records: 8228: "Eskimo Point Hope, Behrings Straits. Ivory arrow straightener, walrus head on end, handle ends in bear's head: angular groove, figures of reindeer and 2 man shooting with bow and arrow, engraved... Belcher Coll. 269) Pres. 10-6-72 by AW Franks. L 7 3/8 W 1 5/8."

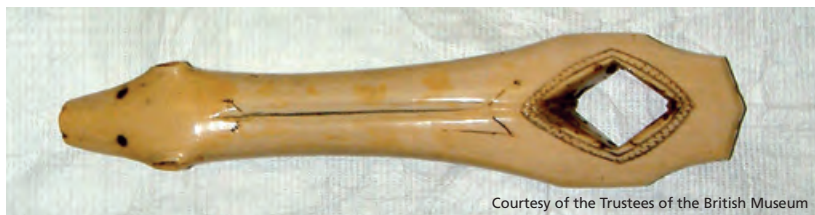
"Esquimaux Cape Lisburne. Implement for chipping arrows: handle of mammoth ivory widely expanded foot ornamented incised patterns - chipper of reindeer-horn - fastening of sinew cord (Blecher coll.: 275) Pres. 10-6-72 by AW Franks."Record card reads: "It was obtained at Cape Lisburne in 182- and is described by Sir Edward Belcher in the Trans. Ethnol. See. London, New Series Vol. 1 p. 139 (no 44) Lond. 1861"

Flint knapper 8241 (below top)

Arrow Shaft Straightener 8228 (below bottom)



Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum



Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

Like bows, arrow shaft straighteners, are rarely seen today in northwest Alaska. These tools straighten arrow shafts in a manner similar to a common wrench. According to Belcher who collected it, once an arrow was carved down to the size a hunter needed, it was then wrapped with wooden shavings, dipped in water and placed over fire in order to produce steam and make the wood flexible. Afterwards the arrow was placed through the hole of the straightener and the force was applied to curved sections until the entire arrow was straight. The handle on the straightener seems to be in the shape of a polar bear with baleen inset eyes, while the distal end may be a walrus shape.

Flint knappers are used to make projectile points. The large rounded end is the handle. Practitioners would apply pressure to flint using the antler tip and flake off chips in order to create sharp blades. The handle is made from ivory and has two engraved caribou calf head depictions at the distal end and engraved circle and dot motifs at the center of the tool.

Innovation

Iñupiaq manufacturing ingenuity is flexible and accommodates new ideas and foreign material. Individuals and communities had different sewing and carving traditions and likewise different materials available to them. Iñupiaq artifacts from the past and their modern-day equivalents often incorporate surprising materials. Pearl recalled the various types of products that women have used to tan sealskin. Historically, fish eggs and urine were often used. As more commercial products became available in village stores, women experimented with products such as mayonnaise, Napa soap mixed with stinkweed, and another product called Goop. John also described using denture cleaner to whiten ivory tusks that he was crafting for sale. Contemporary Iñupiaq artists and practitioners continue to practice this practicality and ingenuity.



(above) Ross Schaeffer of Kotzebue shows his seal hook made with old snow machine parts.

(left) Arlo Davis of Selawik demonstrates his hand drill.

Compared to other Iñupiaq footwear, this soft soled boot is a bit unusual. The sole is not crimped and looks to be made from moose hide. The front upper part is sewn from eight small pieces of hide. "Maybe they were short on skin so they put old material together," thought Faye. The back ankle section is a bleached hide of unknown material while the legging material appears to be suede or even canvas. The laces and loops seem to be the only classic Eskimo-used material: it is most likely sealskin dyed with alder bark.

While the original British Museum record reads, "boots worn by the women of Cape Thompson NW coast of America", the heritage advisors who examined the boot at the BM initially felt that it was not Iñupiaq. In the BM, we all speculated that a British sailor might have made the boot based on those he had seen worn by the Iñupiat. With only the picture at hand, a few women in Alaska including Beda Sloowka from Savoonga, Lela Oman from Kobuk River, and Vica Owen from Kotzebue but originally Anadyr, thought it was a summer boot. "They used whatever material they could find" Lela emphasized. It is very possible that a seamstress obtained foreign material from trade with Chukotka or Western explorers. After seeing a similar style boot in the NMS collection, the Iñupiaq museum consultants were no longer so convinced of its foreign origin. Whoever made the boot expertly crafted many smaller sections of old material – some of it foreign – together to make a functional and probably comfortable summer boot. Interestingly, this boot's mate is housed at the National Museum of Scotland (UC 206).



Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

Boot 1828.12.13.10

Material: unknown hide, moose?, sealskin, canvas?, sinew or thread?

Field Collector: F. W. Beechey
 Museum: The British Museum
 Museum Records: "No 10 (a single boot) Boots worn by the women of Cape Thompson NW Coast of America"

The Relationships Surrounding Tools and Clothing

The knowledge of and proper assessment and use of material and tools required the right set of relationships with people, animals, the land and sea, and even the weather. The HMS *Blossom*/Bering Strait artifacts embody these relationships. The manufacture and use of many of these objects required special relationships. Ron and John described the kind of relationship necessary between two people to make sealskin rope. Similarly, seamstresses emphasized the exchanges of labor between female relatives when processing hides.

While these objects are tools to accomplish tasks or clothes to make life in the arctic possible, they are at the same time gifts; gifts from animals who willingly give themselves to worthy hunters, gifts from hunters who in turn distribute the generosity of the taken animal, and gifts from seamstresses and carvers who fashion beautiful and useful items for deserving kin.



These objects also demonstrate relationships between humans and animals. Carvers often fashioned hunting tools to be appealing and pleasant to various prey. Similarly, people's stories of old things marked important or mundane passages within relationships.

Working Together to Make Tools

Processing and fabricating materials and tools rarely is an individual activity. Cooperation and trust between husbands and wives, brothers, in-laws and other family members are crucial. In some cases, relationships between people strengthen as a result of working together on tasks. John, Faye and Ron described the process for making seal skin rope. Line, rope, thong and lashing are cut from the seal or bearded seal skin. Women prepared the hide as a tube with the blubber, hair and epidermis removed. The hide-tube is then ready for men to cut in a continuous coil to create one long thin line of rope.

They both got to work together – the guy cutting and the guy holding. What you got is a tool, a knife and you have a stick and you wrap it with what you already cut, hold it tight. And the other guy has his knife; [he] uses his fingers as a guide for thickness so the rope is always the same [thickness]. The person who's cutting, he knows what he's going to use his rope for, lasso ropes or harpoon lines. Lashing rope for sleds and stuff they use young ugruk, bearded seal, ugrugaq (M). But the person holding is real critical too because he's got to keep a certain amount of pressure, he can't jerk it. They've got to trust one another. I've seen people do it and they sometimes don't say nice words to each other.
—John Goodwin

Three hunters originally from St. Lawrence Island
and Karlin Itchoak of Nome.

In addition to trusting each other, Faye remarked that “[the men] have to trust the skin, what they cut,” which means that they must depend upon women for preparing the hide properly.

Doing work with others is built around specific family relationships. Regarding the producing of the hide rope, Ron gave details:

My father and uncle were a team – each family has his own team – a pair that know how to work together. They start with a short knife, shave, move [the line around the stick], shave, move. They could spend one hour...depends on the size of the tube and the line they are cutting.

It then gets soaked in water. Ron continued:

They have a line maybe 100 ft long, they have a couple of posts somewhere and stretch the line to dry and that becomes the final product from whaling size line to small net size.

Faye emphasized that processing hide involves a lot of work and so relatives help one another. Faye and Ron identified this ulu as an *igiasushut* (BP), *uluqpaq* (M), a larger ulu used for splitting walrus skin to make the *umiaq*, skin boat cover. Splitting walrus hide requires another tool that one rarely finds in museum collections, *iihkluq*, skin splitting board.



Ulu, number unknown
Material: slate, vegetal root,
Museum: The British Museum



Takashi, Faye, Ian Taylor
of the British Museum,
Amber, and Ron at the
British Museum.

- Faye *I used to help Akha, Katie, my sister, Mable. First thing we would remove the fat, and then after we removed the fat, we would prepare to split the skin in two pieces, but you've got to have special board, iihkluq, for splitting the skin and you've got to have gunny sack for one side of your leg, push it down with your feet. And then work on the walrus skin with ulu... it becomes two skin... we just use a board, iihkluq, a big board*
- Ron *The board's about this high [about two-three feet], half of it goes in the snow and what you have left is kind of a pear shape and you cut this, move the skin, cut another amount. It's a spring activity after the animal hunt, which is early June.*
- Faye *[It takes] about one day. One time Mable and I work on two skins, it took us two days. I always volunteer my time. Andrew's wife was my sister in law. That's how I volunteer my time to help her and try to learn how to do it... and I was trained how to sew them too.*

After looking at photos of the sewing tools and garments in Alaska, many seamstresses promptly fetched their own sealskin or reindeer hides from their *qanitchaq*, entryway, or back room. Motioning with the hides and sometimes imaginary tools, these seamstresses demonstrated tanning and cleaning hides. Faye recalled learning from her mother to remove bearded seal fur from the hide by rolling an evaporated milk can over it. She would sprinkle sand or pumice over the skin and continue to roll it until all of the hairs fell out. "Grandma had kind of rocks to clean her fawn skins. She used rocks after she scraped, *itaaq* – little rocks, for fawn skin parky." There is a hill near Wales, *Kikik*, a place for pumice, where people would gather the mineral. Pearl and John said that they would use ashes from stove, *ugla* (M), to tan hides. When they had them, Pearl and John would use lava rocks that they gathered from a beach near Shishmaref.

Ian, Takashi, Pearl and John
at the British Museum.

While some tools brought people together to work, other items kept them apart. In the old days before rifles, hunters needed to get close to their prey. Animals being stalked by hunters would be alerted by the odors of human homes and human beings. Hunting equipment therefore was stored in the *qanitchaq* or shed, especially during hunting season.

Animals are real sensitive – [they have a] good sense of smell. According to grandma, when she'd tell stories, when these hunters started...they were going, tracking fox, maybe two days, they would smell, they want to smell like the animals. These Natives, the hunters, they hang their clothes outside so they don't pick up the odors of the house and [of] women. Some of them don't even sleep with their wives in the fall.
—John Goodwin



Caring for Clothing and People

Hunters of the past also tried to avoid soiling their clothes with blood. If hunting clothing became dirty, the items needed to be cleaned and the odors eliminated.

For my father, when I was a little girl and then when I got married I used to take care of their clothes, first thing I use was water to remove the blood of walrus and reindeer. My father used to keep the hunting parka in his storm shed, he didn't use them in the street, he had two layers of parky, he didn't bring it in [to the home].

—Faye Ongtowsruk

As Faye said, “people were short on stuff” and needed to care for what they did have. Of course concern for the tool was in effect, concern for the person using the tool or wearing the clothing, since even small knicks or tears in boots, clothing or tools could have disastrous outcomes for the users. While poring over a fawn parka, we discussed other ways to care for clothing. If it gets wet, Faye warned, you have to keep the hide from shrinking by kneading the parka.



Caribou Fawn Parka Q72AM2

Material: caribou fawn fur, wolf, sinew

Field Collector: Frederick William Beechey

Museum: The British Museum



Faye flipped the hood forward to look at the crown of the hood. "Older women always look at the hood to see if it's a man or woman's", commented Pearl. Pearl and Faye concluded that it is most likely a women's because of the pointed hood and its size. Faye added, "fawn is a summertime parka" worn with the fur on the outside, which perhaps explains its stitches. She noted the tiny and accurate stitches from the skin-side of the parka. It is *ahlipsiq* (BS) sewing, or sewn from the fur side, perhaps as Turid suggested, so that the stitches won't irritate the skin of the wearer since the parka would have been worn directly against the wearer's skin. The cuffs and bottom hem, sewn with normal stitching, *kilapiaq* (BS), protect the parka from stretching and losing its shape.

People probably had a few parkas throughout the year and this one might have been worn with a second parka over it in the winter. John suspected that the ruff was worn in the fashion of older people who sometimes tuck their ruffs inside the hood to keep out the draft.

The hood is sewn with fur from the skull of the caribou. The back of the fawn covers the front and back center of the parka, which Faye explained is the first piece that is sewn. Fawn belly forms the sides and the tail part makes up the bottom piece in the back – the choice piece, mentioned Faye. Pearl explained the importance of the neckline and shoulder.



The way women cut the neckline is important; [it] keeps the rest of the parka inline. My mom always said women always make their parky or atikluk without shoulder part – they forget they have shoulders. After she died, I looked at her parkys, I wanted to see what she meant, she had a curve on her shoulder part.

—Pearl Goodwin

Faye at the British Museum.



**Harpoon 1828.12.13.34 (top),
1828.12.13.35 (middle), 96-449 (lower)**

Material: Wood, ivory, sealskin

Field Collector: Frederick William Beechey

Museum: The British Museum

Museum Records: 1828.12.13.34:

"St. Lawrence Island - harpoon for whale or walrus." 1828.12.13.35: "Kotzebue Sound - harpoon for whale or walrus." 96.449 "Harpoon ivory point - bone butt" "Eskimo. Purchased Christy Fund [United Services Museum]."

"Eskimo tools - spears swords and harpoons Presented by Capt. F.W. Beechey" The whole of this series formed one trophy at the U. S. M. of which the above was the funeral label."

Made to Measure

Many tools and clothing items were specifically designed and made for one person. Harpoons, bows, scrapers, parkas and footwear fit the bodies of their user. Harpoons are made by an individual and measurements are determined from the user's own body. These harpoons, *unaaq* (singular), were probably used for walrus and *ugruk*, bearded seal, but the harpoon shafts are incomplete. They are missing the foreshaft, harpoon head, blade and attached line. The sharp ivory pick at one end is a multifunctional tool for testing the ice and for using as a lance.



Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum



Skin scraper 8219

Material: Driftwood, flint

Field Collector: Edward Belcher

Museum: The British Museum

Museum Records: "Plane, wood handle, deep depressions for thumb and four fingers, square cutter of dark grey flint ? with tang?; both faces smooth 5 1/2 and flat with polish.. (Belcher Coll Lot 30)

Pres: 10/6/72 by AW Franks"

Iñupiaq carvers noted that they created scrapers in particular to fit the hand of their wives. Ross Schaeffer even molded his wife's grip with clay to more accurately replicate it in her tools. When Willie Goodwin started making women's ulus, he watched women work and asked them what kind of handle offers the best support because he joked, "if you don't make tools just right for women's hands, then they find every excuse not to do their work." Ultimately, he learned that an off-centered handle, in which the four fingers have more area to grip than the thumb, provides the best balance.

The handle of this scraper is perfectly carved to fit the pointer and middle finger on the top and the grip of the thumb and ring and pinky finger on the sides and bottom. There is only one way to grab this scraper and probably only a few hands that could use it and as such, made tools are intimate items. Makers not only design tools to fit the hand or bodies of tool users but they use parts of the body as measurement. "Your hand is your ruler." Faye mentioned.



Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

Root diggers, *sikḷaq* (BS) and *ivruqsiñ* (M) too, fit the hand of their user. Barbara remembered the small root digger that her father crafted for her child-size hand when she was young. She thought that this root digger is most likely for *quagaq*, sour dock, because the plant's roots are shallow; Faye and Barbara use the whole plant, *quagaq* roots, leaves, and stem. Faye explained that the digger could also be used for *masu* or *putiniq* or *utiiq*. Everyone shared stories of their picking experiences and Pearl and Faye discussed recipes. Seeing the root digger incited Faye to reminisce about her own *sikḷaq* and the thoughtfulness of her husband:

I use those [root diggers]. When my husband was alive he made me a sikḷaq and he put a brass blade...but he didn't use rope, he used wire to tighten it...he's got tools to [engrave it], electrical [tools]...and then he put my social security number on it!

We all laughed as Ron exclaimed, "[an] example of identification design!"

Compared to some of the more elaborate Eskimo hunting tools, *lñupiaq* root diggers look relatively utilitarian but this tool captured our attention. Perhaps the tool intrigued us because of the object's dual role as an essential personal tool and a cherished hand-made gift between husbands and wives and fathers and daughters.

...because mostly all my life, I use those things to live: picking greens, clamming, wild onions.

—Faye Ongtowsruk



Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

Root Digger 8229

Material: Driftwood, bone or antler, sealskin, alder bark

Field Collector: Edward Belcher

Museum: The British Museum

Museum Records: "Implement No 29 Pick for digging roots; short, bulbed wood handle painted red; groove at end of bulb into which is fastened a piece of bone... Belcher coll. lot 266. pres. by AW Franks." "Pick for digging roots." "Sir Edward says so they thought; Pick made of reindeer bone used for digging roots."

Sharing Handles and Transforming Tools

This *ulimmaun* handle is made from heavy sea mammal bone material. The head is walrus jaw bone. The two pieces (handle and head) meet via a wooden plane at a 60° angle and are bound through drilled holes with sealskin cord, which was wetted first to ensure a taut line. A heavy and sharp chunk of iron extends horizontally beyond the bone head from a slit and a small wooden wedge is lodged into the engraved slit for the iron to nestle tightly in-place.

Adzes, *ulimmaun* (M) (singular), are primarily used for shaping the basic form of paddles, boat frames or sled runners. Wilfred Lane from Kotzebue (originally Point Hope) also explained that adzes were used to break ice. Ernest Burch writes that the adze and pickaxe excavated soil to build caches and semi-subterranean houses (2006: 206).



Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

Noticing the wedge, Fred Tocktoo explained that handles were interchangeable with different heads. Archaeologists explain that ancient Eskimo tool handles are more rare than projectile points, diggers and planes within the archaeological record. The heads of tools, which absorb most of the impact, appear in middens – thrown out after too much wear, or stored in hunters' caches to wait the next season. Handles are taken off the broken head or off-season tools and rebound onto another more immediately-needed tool. These interchangeable handles might explain why in interviews women called this adze a *sikfaq*, pickaxe – most often used for gathering roots – and men called it an *ulimmaun*. Perhaps women used the handle with a pickaxe head for digging roots, while men used an adze head on the handle when carving wood.



Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

Adze 8221

Material: Walrus bone, iron, sealskin, wood

Field Collector: Edward Belcher

Museum: The British Museum

Museum Records: "Bone adze with iron blade fused into bone head and wedged with wood; slip of wood between ends of handle and head which are tied together with hide thongs...Belcher coll. Lot 277. Pres. June 10, 1972 by AW Franks." "Sir Edward obtained this at Point Hope Alaska W of Pt Barrow"

A similar adze, collected by Frederick William Beechey, is housed at the Pitt Rivers Museum, PRM AM662. John Bockstoe noted that along the handle of this adze there is a dorsal-ventral groove and three drilled holes of unknown use. He suggested; “perhaps the handle had some other, prior use” (1977: 72).

Remembering People and Places

When examining labrets or viewing photographs of them, many Elders humorously recalled old men with tea or tobacco leaking from the holes in their chins that once secured labrets. Others laughed at the memories of the faces these men could pull off due to the holes in their chins.

Historically, male relatives of a teenage boy pierced two small holes at the sides of his chin with a lancet. A small ivory or bone plug was then inserted to maintain the holes (Burch 2006: 255). Once the teenager became accustomed to the hole, he would insert a larger plug gradually making the hole larger. Most men went through six to ten graduated plugs. With time and wealth, men made and wore labrets, *tuutaq* (M) of jade (nephrite), bone, ivory, beads, and quartz.

The 19th century collector and naturalist, Edward Nelson, writes that once labret holes were large enough, men drilled holes in the small ends of plugs and strung them on a cord: “These he may keep among his small effects or they may be hung as pendent ornaments to the end of his wife’s waist belt, or to the strap of her needle case” (1983: 48). A similar practice of holding on to labrets and other small artifacts occurs with many residents of northwest Alaska today. After viewing the photos of the artifacts, many people pulled out their own keepsake plugs or broken projectile points that they had found on the ground over the years, and which serve as mementoes of people, places and events.



Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

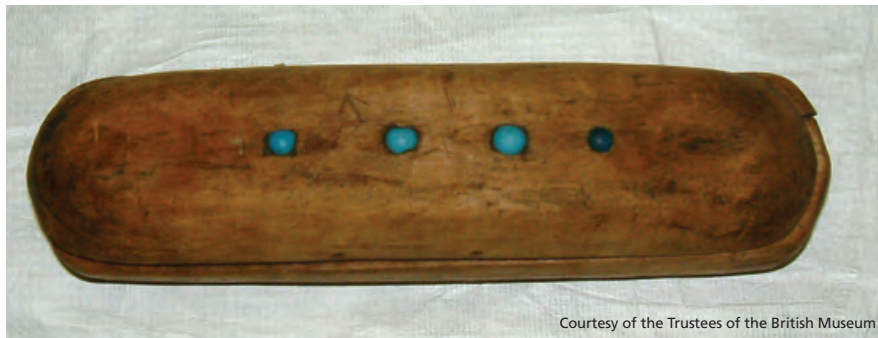
Graduated labrets 8196

Material: Ivory

Field Collector: Edward Belcher

Museum: The British Museum

Museum Records: “Set of 3 labrets of walrus ivory, forming a graduated series commencing with smallest at first making of the incision; the opening gradually enlarged by increasing the size of labret (Belcher coll. pres. 6/10/1872 by AW Franks)”



Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

Woman's sewing box 8233

Material: Driftwood, glass beads, bone, sealskin

Field Collector: Edward Belcher

Museum: The British Museum

Museum Records: "Box and cover made of pine wood, narrow, oblong, with rounded ends; hinges made of thongs: 4 pale blue glass beads inlaid in a line along middle of top; end of box mended. Belcher Coll. Pres. June 10, 1872 by AW Franks"

(right) Turid and Faye at the British Museum

A woman's sewing box, *mitkutikavik* (M), keeps pieces of sinew, sewing scraps and other paraphernalia all in one place. Ross Schaeffer even suggested that women might have stored medicinal herbs gathered from the tundra. Several women mentioned that in addition to keeping sewing tools and material, a sewing box also stored one's favorite things. Faye remembered her grandmother's sewing box, which was almost identical to this one, but slightly larger and sewn with sinew or root seams. Her grandmother kept her much cherished tobacco stash in her box.

This box is made of pine wood with four blue beads inlaid on top. Each bead is cut in half with the flat end secured to the wood probably to efficiently make use of the precious glass. The hinges are sewn together with sealskin line. This box was cared for so highly that somebody mended the split side rim with ivory and possibly baleen pegs.





Relationships with Animals

These artifacts not only represent relationships between people but also between humans and animals. Jonathan King, Keeper of the Department of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas at the British Museum, brought our attention to an unusual net float. The net float, *puktagun* (M), is made from root, and is dyed with ochre or alder bark. It has two ivory seal figurines as toggles that dangle from an ivory clasp at the bottom. William Fitzhugh and Susan Kaplan wrote that these toggles rattle when an animal is caught, thus, alerting the hunter (1982). A loop wrapped with baleen twine extends from the top. Graphite lines embellish the float in the shape of four whale's tails and parallel lines down the side, which reminded us of women's chin tattoos. It is balanced and beautiful. We had not seen one quite like it before. Ron discussed its detail, "If you decorate your tool, it's going to bring animals to you. It's part of the belief."

Ron explained that decorating tools was in fact, partly functional.

You still have same feeling as about 500 years ago, they believed in making their hunting implements as beautiful as possible, so that your weapon was friendly to what you were hunting.

—Ron Senungetuk



Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

Net Float 1855.11-170

Material: drift wood, ivory, baleen, graphite, alder dye or ochre

Museum: The British Museum



This harpoon blade box is carved into the shape of a baleen whale with a blue bead inset on its back. The inside is hollowed out and filled with thistle down and six slate whaling harpoon blades, which are secured in the box with a sinew-secured lid. The box would have been stored up front in the umiaq near the harpooner, should he need to quickly replace a broken blade. There are a few whale-shaped boxes in other museum collections from Little Diomed, which is probably where this box originates. Interestingly, William Fitzhugh and Susan Kaplan notice that several of the whale boxes have one tail clipped (as does the tail of this box), and they suggest that it represents a captured whale (1982 and Morrison 1991: 42).

Ron noted the usefulness of this tool and suggests the object's other defensive abilities:

This whale shaped box is a box for stone blades. Protection. Protective device just like a paper carton, except it is made to look like a spiritual item, as well, it talks to animals, it is a connection between the animal and the hunter, at the same time, it's a container.



Box for projectile points 8268

Material: Driftwood, sinew, glass bead, vegetal fibre

Field Collector: Edward Belcher

Museum: The British Museum

Museum Records: "Esquimaux Icy Cape.

Box and cover in form of a whale, cut out of pine wood, connected by cord of plaited sinew, lined with thistle down, corner of tail

71/2 3 1/2 broken off, blue glass beads on bottom. Belcher coll. 265. Pres by AW Franks

10-6-72." "This box contained the 7 slate lance points."



Identities Associated with Tools and Garments



Ester Norton of Kotzebue displaying her fancy ground squirrel parka, Kotzebue, September 2007.

Specific kinds of relationships were forged based on where individuals came from. Historically, one's regional and personal identity was essential for opportunities to trade, travel, and use resources of the land: these use rights were strictly regulated by Iñupiat Nations (Burch 1998). Clothing in particular, identified where a person came from, and thus, where that person belonged, who they were related to and what kind of alliances they

brought with them. Faye said that the tusk design along the front chest of a parka was identification that you were from Wales: "Only Wales people were allowed to use the tusk parka".

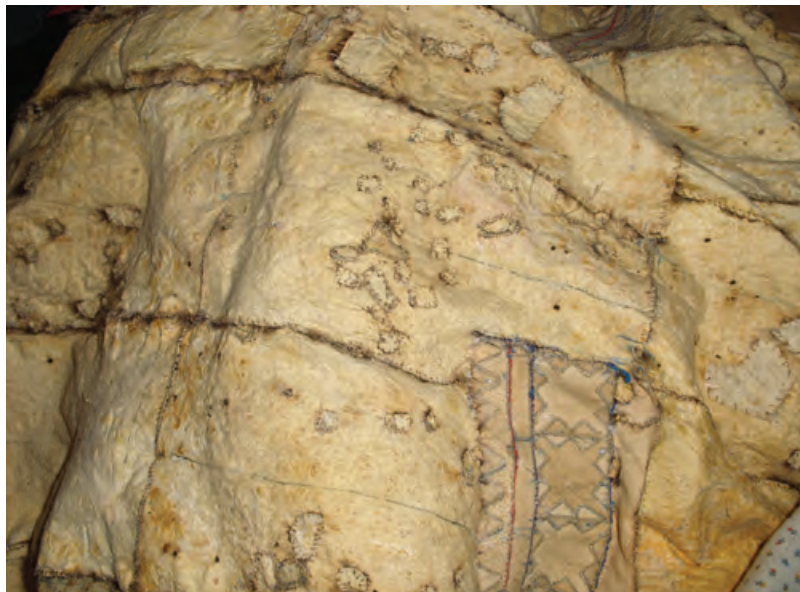
Many people will recognize the distinctly Kotzebue style parka demonstrated so beautifully in Ester Norton's fancy parka. Village and Native Corporation logo clothing identifies where Iñupiat are from in a similar way as regional parka designs did for Iñupiat in the past.



The original British Museum record for this boot reads “Men’s boots of Kotzebue’s Sound, Reindeer Skin”. The design of the boot reminded both Faye and Pearl of Kotzebue style footwear. Pearl, however, did note that the construction of the boot differed from contemporary Kotzebue-style mukluks. It is missing the *qillmigun* section, the section that folds over before it is sewn between the sole, *kinmigun*, and the upper section, *sivua*. (See Burch 2006: table 19 for a thorough description of Iñupiaq footwear.)

The heritage advisors also agreed that the material was reindeer and not caribou. When this boot was made, reindeer hides would have originated in Chukotka. Quite possibly, this hide traveled across the Bering Strait, via Chukchi, Wales, or Little Diomedé traders to the international trade fair at Sisualik where it was then purchased by someone living near Kotzebue Sound. The legging of this boot alternates between dark and light fur – a subtle decorative element. In addition to the strength and pliability of reindeer hide and sinew, seamstresses treasured the different colors of reindeer fur, especially before cowhide was available. Faye mentioned that albino reindeer especially remains popular for sewing.

Seamstresses were meticulous and matched torn or holey furs together seamlessly, which is demonstrated on the inside of Ester’s fancy ground squirrel parka (below). Only by looking on the inside of the parka can you appreciate the effort expended to make the outside fur look unspoiled and flawless.



Boot 1828.12.13.2 (right)

Material: Reindeer, bearded sealskin, wolverine, fetal seal, sinew, alder dye
Field Collector: F. W. Beechey
Museum: The British Museum
Museum Records: “2. (a single boot) “Men’s boots of Kotzebue’s Sound” Reindeer skin”

(left) The meticulous stitching on the inside of Ester’s squirrel parka.



Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

Regional Identity

The trim or *kullipak* (M) on the top of the legging was not only beautiful but most importantly, Pearl, John and Ron emphasized, it highlighted where a person came from and thus, displayed one's identity. This trim has a dyed strip of wolverine hide, sewn skin side out, with fur extending from the trim at the top. The trim also is decorated with tiny red tufts of fetal seal fur. Luke and Angela Kunuk of Point Hope remembered trying different kinds of dyes for hides – most of which would fade – but red crate paper stocked by the Anica stores used to be a favorite among the women of Point Hope.

Ester Norton of Kotzebue explained that regional designs on clothing became much more complicated and ornate with the introduction of scissors and metal ulus. Old style designs included straight lines and "hills," which are alternating triangles: "fancy old style [was] strait lines...they didn't have [metal] ulus and scissors, they had only stone ulu...I copy [and] I know the old style... they always make strait lines and they had hills".

The sole of this boot is finely crimped. Crimped hard bearded seal hide is another ingenious form of Eskimo technology that is hard to replace. Because the soles are not cut all the way through but only chewed or split with pliers or boot crimpers, they remain both waterproof and extremely sturdy. Frank Koonook of Point Hope recalled that bearded seal hide is so sturdy and tough that one hide has many lives. In Point Hope, and in other whaling communities, after the *umiaq* cover (made from *ugruk*) is worn out, the cover is taken off and used in the June whaling festival for the blanket toss, *nalukataq*. Once the blanket toss is over, remaining strong pieces of hide are cut up and given to older women to make mukluk hard soles, *atunak* (M) or *atunagraq* (Foote 1992).

According to the museum record these boots were worn by a man but the five Iñupiaq museum consultants felt that it was a fancy boot for a woman. "Maybe she danced in these boots" Barbara suggested.



Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

1828.12.13.2
Trim and sole
of boot.





Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

Arrows 96.456, 96.457, 96.458, 96.459, 96.460, 96.461, 96.462, 96.463, 96.464

Material: Wood, bone, ivory, feathers, sealskin, baleen
 Field Collector: Frederick William Beechey
 Museum: The British Museum
 Museum Records: regarding blunt point: "Bird arrow - bone point...remaining arrows "arrow - bone point", "remaining arrows "arrow - bone point." "N W Coast of America. Christy Fund [United Service Institution]"

Bag Handle 8211

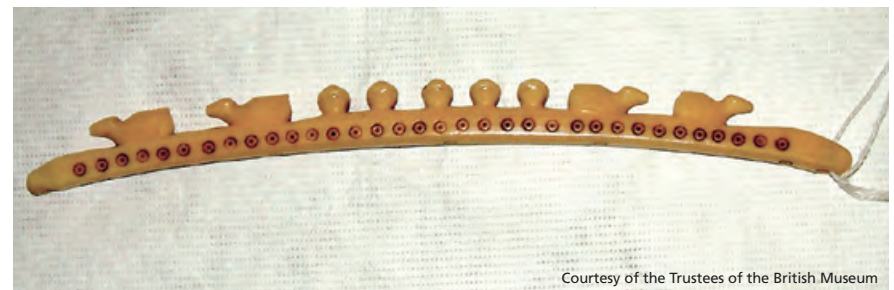
Material: Ivory
 Field Collector: Edward Belcher
 Museum: The British Museum
 Museum Records: "Sir Edward says this is a netting gauge - It looks very like a drill bow, From neighbourhood of Icy Cape." "Slender curved implement of walrus ivory, perforated at ends ornamented wide incised circles on 3 sides; 5 seal heads and figures of animals sculptured on convex side. Belcher coll. 209. Pres: 10-6-72 by AW Franks"

Personal Identity

Individual tools also needed to identify their owners. John and Ron and other carvers describe many of the decorations and notches within tools as identity and ownership marks. Marks upon arrows or harpoons easily identify who struck the animal first and thus, who has rights to it. Repeatedly, the heritage advisors noted that the meaning of tools or clothing embellished in a special way, was, "this belongs to me".

The arrows pictured here are made from single rods of spruce driftwood that conform to a groove at the butt end for inserting the bowstring. Most of them have some remains of three pieces of fletching, which are wrapped with caribou sinew, most likely. There is one bird blunt arrow. Each is decorated with different parallel, hatched, zigzag lines most likely indicating their owners mark. While examining HMS *Blossom*/Iñupiaq collections at different museums I came across the same ownership mark at two different museums. In the 19th century when precious ethnographic objects entered Great Britain, collectors divided up objects that they considered to be 'replicas'. Thus, one man's quiver full of arrows was split up, perhaps traded for different tools, and eventually deposited in different museums.

Although the museum records describe this tool as a net gauge or drill bow, it is most likely an ivory bag handle. There is a hole drilled at each end. Four caribou calves are carved onto the handle, two at both ends and five seal heads are carved in the middle of the handle. Circle dot engravings filled with brown dye cover the entire length of two sides and the bottom has two circle dot motifs engraved into it.



Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

These handles often were made for woman's bags that were made from the whole seal, *puukata* (M) or wooden buckets. Vince Pikonganna appreciated the elaborate carving and circle dot engraving on this handle, which are mostly used, he explained, to say "this is mine" – as a way of self identifying. Some of the icons depicted are also tallies of game taken.

People were most impressed with the two large jade (nephrite) labrets, which they all seem to agree must have been worn by a wealthy person due to jade's relative rarity and hardness. Both of these large labrets were collected around Kotzebue Sound by Lieutenant Belcher. Nelson collected a similar one in the 1880s also from Kotzebue Sound (1983: 62). Ross Schaeffer explained that Kobuk jade is so hard that, historically, Iñupiat would grind the jade smooth by tying a piece of it to a string, which was then tied to a tree or sturdy branch. The piece of jade was then placed in the river against a sandy bottom. The current and sand with time slowly ground the jade smooth.



Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

Jade labret 8205, 8206, 8199, 8197, 8200, 8198, 8201, 8202, 8204, 8203 (above)

Material: Jade, chert? flint?, glass beads, bone, stone

Field Collector: Edward Belcher

Museum: The British Museum

Museum Records: "Belcher coll. lot 248

Pres: 10/6/72 by A. W. Franks"

(left) Faye and Barbara at the British Museum.

Work Accomplished

The opportunity to exchange knowledge about such important historic Iñupiaq artifacts has been valuable. Many of the artifacts from the HMS *Blossom*/Bering Strait collection have been documented by Iñupiaq heritage advisors. Both Iñupiat and British museums have enhanced their understanding of 19th century Iñupiaq artistic traditions and technology and this particular moment of Bering Strait history. Furthermore, the Iñupiaq heritage advisors and museum staff have forged professional relationships based on this experience. As this material and the images of the artifacts



(above) Vica Owen of Kotzebue.

(right) Levi Cleveland of Shungak, Amber, and Willie Goodwin of Kotzebue.

continue to circulate throughout northwest Alaska, we expect that Iñupiaq artists, educators and language specialist will use the information for their own individual and community-generated projects.

Despite this valuable hard work, some Iñupiat were frustrated that the objects are so far from their original home and were concerned that the museum documentation about the origins and makers of the tools is relatively limited. The Iñupiaq heritage advisors discussed this as a group with Henrietta Lidchi, Keeper of World Cultures at National Museums Scotland, toward the end of our visit while viewing photos of Iñupiaq artifacts housed at the NMS. Museum exchanges such as ours, however, offer hope.



Ron *According to our experience these last few days, there is an incredible amount of information that needs to be placed on these [the museum records]*

Henrietta *That's the marvel of new technology. [Museums] can share the information. And as long as the information comes back [to the museums] because the important thing is that those records don't look like that in 10 years time...that they don't have their terminology all mixed up...it's important that we have a way of interpreting the collections which is beyond the original documentations.*

John *We can assist you on that...to the best of our ability. You got to try to catch us while some of us still have the memory of it, [our assistance] will just shorten your research, [it will] make it easier...I'm pretty touched, what I've seen, what we've heard and seen these past few days. It's a good starting point. We're all impressed.*

Ron *[I'm] glad it's there. Sometimes we hate it, when it was taken away, especially by not so moral means, but...we can also say, glad it's here somewhere.*

Henrietta *And since it is here, it's best to make sure that everyone can understand it better.*

Amber *And [it's important] that the information gets back to Alaska.*

Ron *Yea, [that the information goes] both ways.*



At the British Museum: Ian, Robert Storrie(curator of North America, BM), Ron, Turid, Pearl, Birgit Pauksztat (formerly of BM,) John, Barbara, Faye, and Amber.

Our Hope

We are working so that knowledge spreads in both directions: to Iñupiaq communities and museums who house valuable Iñupiaq material heritage. These central perspectives (from the descendants of the objects original makers) and many Iñupiaq terms are now permanently recorded in the museum archives of the British Museum, the Pitt Rivers Museum and National Museums Scotland, thus investing the objects with Iñupiaq significance and meaning for future generations.

This project valuably enhanced museum records and Iñupiaq people's knowledge of their cultural heritage but the value of this project also lies in the moments between people who fondly reminisced about lives, land, and things. I hope that this pamphlet of pictures of old tools and accompanying narratives will continue to foster moments of conversations about and engagements with people, their history, the material from their land and waters and their skills and knowledge – all of which are delicately enmeshed within a single tool.

About the Authors

Amber Lincoln is a doctoral candidate in Anthropology at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland. She now lives in Fairbanks.

John Goodwin from Kotzebue, is a marine mammal hunter and fisherman who has served on many fish and game advisory committees.

Pearl Goodwin is originally from Kobuk region but moved to Kotzebue. She has participated in harvesting sea mammals and with fishing, and with processing and preparing foods. Pearl worked for the hospital as a community health aide.

Faye Ongtowsruk (Wales). She and her family have managed a reindeer herd for over 50 years. She is an accomplished seamstress and an expert in harvesting plants and roots. She also serves on the Kawerak Elders Advisory Council.

Barbara Weyiouanna, the daughter of Faye Ongtowsruk, is an accomplished Eskimo dancer. She works for Nome Eskimo Community as a tutor for students.

Ron Senungetuk is from Wales, Alaska and is an artist. Ron founded and directed the University of Alaska Fairbanks Native Arts Center from 1965-1986.



Works Cited

- Beechey, F. W. 1831.** Narrative of a voyage to the Pacific and Beering's Strait: to co-operate with the polar expeditions: performed in His Majesty's ship Blossom, under the command of Captain F. W. Beechey ... in the years 1825, 26, 27, 28. ... Published by authority of the Admiralty.
London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley.
- Belcher, E. 1861.** *On the manufacture of Works of art by the Esquimaux.*
Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London 1:129-146.
- Bockstoe, J. R. 1977.** Eskimos of Northwest Alaska in the early nineteenth century: based on the Beechey and Belcher Collections and records compiled during the voyage of *H.M.S. Blossom* to Northwest Alaska in 1826 and 1827.
Oxford: Pitt Rivers Museum University of Oxford.
- Burch, E. S. 1998.** *The Inupiaq Eskimo nations of northwest Alaska.*
Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press.
- Burch, E. S. 2006.** *Social Life in Northwest Alaska: the structure of Inupiaq Eskimo Nations.*
Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press.
- Fitzhugh, W. W., and S. A. Kaplan. 1983.** *Inua: Spirit World of the Bering Sea Eskimo.*
Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Foote, B. A. 1992.** *The Tigara Eskimos and Their Environment: Point Hope, Alaska.*
Barrow: North Slope Borough Commission on History, Language and Culture.
- Morrison, D. 1991.** *The Diamond Jenness Collections from the Bering Strait.*
Hull: Canadian Museum of Civilization.
- Murdock, J. 1892.** *Ethnological results of the Point Barrow Expedition.*
Washington: Governments Printing Office.
- Nelson, E. W. 1983.** *The Eskimo about Bering Strait.*
Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- VanStone, J. W. 1976.** *The Bruce Collection of Eskimo Material Culture from Port Clarence, Alaska.*
Fieldiana Publications 67:117.
- VanStone, J. W. 1980.** *The Bruce Collections of Eskimo Material Culture form Kotzebue Sound, Alaska.*
Fieldiana Publications 1:144.



Vince Pikonganna with his grandfather's harpoon line spool in Nome, September 2009.