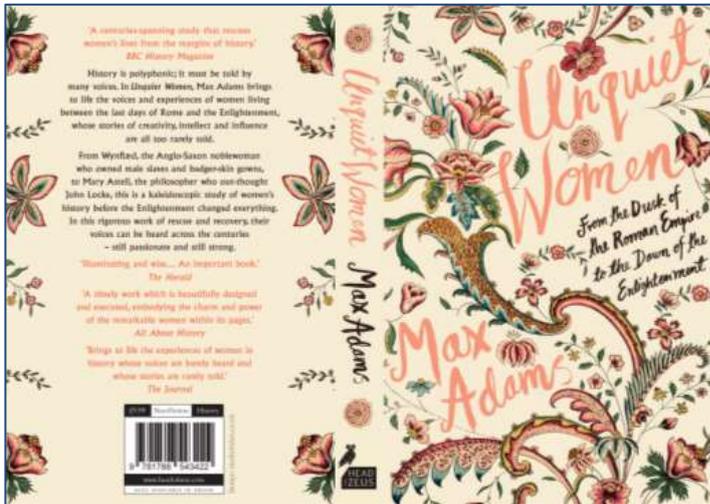


Issues and reissues

A flurry of publishing activity for the autumn.... Even though the *First Kingdom* is delayed in its hardback release until February, there are a new foreign translation and two paperback releases to look forward to. *Unquiet Women* is due for its first paperback release in November – and I have a preview of the cover to share. As readers will know, or suspect, hardback editions don't



often make much money – they are released to get reviews for the paperback; and they are often, if I may say so, overpriced. UQW was expensive in hardback at £20, so it's nice to see it in an affordable format, with some kind reviews on the back cover. This was an important project for me personally, especially as Head of Zeus were slightly sceptical of the project. I hope it does well. And then, they have found a way to cram *Trees of Life* into a paperback edition.

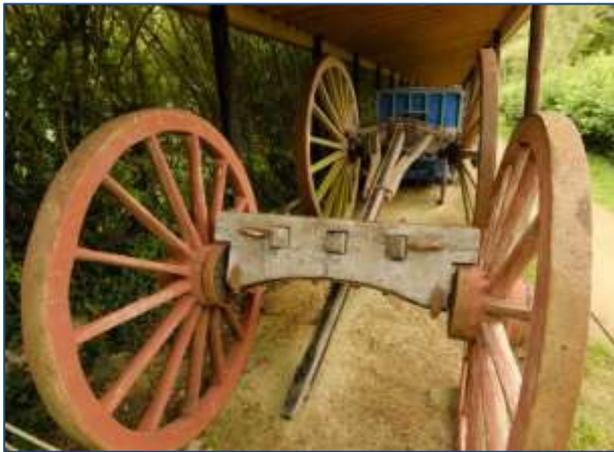
I haven't seen a preview yet, because it involves some tricky re-setting of text and images; perhaps even some trimming of the text, which was closely tailored to fit each page – not something I would normally have to consider. Another new version of an old book arrived in the post this week – three copies of *The Wisdom of Trees*. At least, I THINK it was WOT, since I can't read the Korean script on the cover. I still haven't worked out which characters are my name...

The Wood Age: research gathers pace at last

It has been a frustrating time, not being able to travel to collect stories and images for the new book project. I have been doing plenty of reading and thinking about our woody human past; but there's nothing like seeing the artefacts themselves. At last, at the beginning of the month, I was able to get down to London and take in three museums: the Horniman, in Dulwich, which has a small but fine ethnographic collection, including some nasty-looking spears and a fabulous Dogon (from Mali) carved door. The lighting there, as in so many museums with vulnerable collections, is not great; and the information to go with the displays is woeful – and there is no catalogue on sale in the shop. A pity; even so, I found plenty of useful material. Just two artefacts of interest in the Natural History Museum in Knightsbridge: the Clacton Spear (the oldest wooden artefact in the world – so old, in fact, that it forms part of the human evolution display); and a similarly ancient digging stick – an underrated invention, but not underrated by foragers. Then I spent a long morning in a pleasantly deserted British Museum, even though all the upstairs galleries are closed. I was most interested to see the ethnographic collections which used to be housed in the Museum of Mankind – once housed in the Commonwealth Institute. Apart from some more dismal lighting – a

triumph of 'design' over utility – the collections are extensive, interesting and well-labelled. Some terrific material from Africa, some of it contemporary. Even so, the artefact that struck me most in my visit was Grayson Perry's sensational *Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman* – something of a touchstone for a project that deals with intangibles and nameless geniuses, as *The Wood Age* does. I urge everyone to see it in the flesh.

After that whirlwind trip I had another few days away: first to see the Weald and Downland Museum in West Sussex: a treasury of medieval and other buildings, devices, vehicles and implements. My favourites were the timber wain (a simple but rather special means of transporting very heavy logs, using the shaft as a giant



lever);
the
treadmill



and the ploughs, carts, framed houses
that litter the place: all well-presented.

The week got even more interesting, as I spent four days with Ben Law (he of the famous Woodland House in Channel 4's *Grand Designs*). He was teaching a course in round wood chestnut framing – which I'm interested in anyway; but it was partly

also an excuse to meet and talk with him; and see the beautiful house for myself. I had a great time with my fellow trainees and Ben's apprentice Olly Moses. I learned much and found plenty to inspire one of the chapters in *The Wood Age*.

