

## PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

### Society is First Stop for Exhibition on Looting of Iraq's Past

**LONDON, UK – 5 June 2009.** The infamous looting of the National Museum in Baghdad was a cultural catastrophe which caught the world's attention in the early days of the Iraq war.

But the looting of archaeological sites continues. That is why the travelling exhibition, *Catastrophe! The Looting and Destruction of Iraq's Past*, has come to Britain as part of an ongoing campaign to raise awareness of the importance of protecting cultural property during armed conflict.

This is the first time the exhibition, produced by the Oriental Institute in Chicago, has been shown in London. In its role as a focal point for those concerned with public policy and the heritage, The Society of Antiquaries is pleased to host *Catastrophe!* at its headquarters in Burlington House, Piccadilly.

This travelling version of the exhibition has been funded by the UK National Commission for UNESCO, Newcastle University and the North East Regional Museums Hub. The display of photographs and information boards charts the looting of the Iraq National Museum in Baghdad and the continuing looting of archaeological sites in the country.

Its opening in June coincides with the launch of the paper back edition of "The Destruction of Cultural Heritage in Iraq", edited by Peter G Stone and Joanne Farchakh Bajjalay and published by Boydell & Brewer.

Professor Stone, of Newcastle University, is a Fellow of the Society (FSA) and a member of the Culture Committee of the UK National Commission for UNESCO. He said: 'A country's cultural heritage is crucial to its nationhood and is a source of pride and dignity. Archaeologists and those in the heritage community must now engage with the military and politicians to ensure sites, museums and artefacts are protected, or they have no right to complain when that cultural heritage is destroyed.'

The exhibition is free. It opens to the public from 15 to 26 June, including the weekend. Hours of opening are 10am to 5pm daily. The Society of Antiquaries of London, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W1J 0BE.

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### Notes to Editors

- **The Society of Antiquaries of London** exists for 'the encouragement, advancement and furtherance of the study and knowledge of the antiquities and history of this and other countries' (the words of our Royal Charter, 1751).

*It was founded in 1707 in a tavern by three like-minded men who wanted to further the study of British history. It now has 2,900 fellows around the world who are specialists in the fields of archaeology, art and architectural history, heraldry, archival research, conservation and cultural resource management.*

*The Society is active in lobbying the government for the United Kingdom to sign the Hague Convention, the international legal agreement which protects the cultural heritage in times of armed conflict. With the process for signing underway in the United States of America, the UK is currently the only international power not to have signed up to the agreement.*

- **The UK National Commission for UNESCO** is the focal point in the UK for UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization)-related policies and activities. As an independent body, the UK National Commission brings together a network of nearly 250 experts from across the UK in the fields of education, culture, sciences and communication. Working closely in partnership with HM Government and UK civil society, the UK National Commission aims to provide expert advice to the Government on UNESCO related matters, develop UK input into UNESCO policy-making, promote reforms within UNESCO, and encourage support in the UK for UNESCO's ideals and work.

*As part of the Commission's commitment to protecting cultural heritage worldwide by making the UK responses to UNESCO's cultural conventions more effective, the Commission helped sponsor the travelling exhibition Catastrophe! The Looting and Destruction of Iraq's Past to raise awareness of the importance of protecting cultural property during armed conflict.*