

## **OBITUARIES**

### **ROGER M. JACOBI 1947–2009: A PERSONAL MEMORY**



I first met Roger in October 1983 when I was just eighteen years old and starting to read archaeology at Lancaster University. My room lay opposite the Department of Classics and Archaeology staff offices and seminar rooms. The occupant of the room directly across from mine was soon to invite me to attend a seminar about the Palaeolithic archaeology of Britain and to become a very good friend. He was Roger Jacobi.

Lectures with Roger were always entertaining. He could conjure up wonderful pictures of reindeer being stalked by Upper Palaeolithic hunters armed with their flint tipped spears. I, with a handful of other students, was soon volunteering to help out on his occasional Wednesday afternoon expeditions to look for microliths on moorland above Malham, once even in the snow. As it became dark he would take us to the closest village pub and stand us all a drink before we were driven back to the campus by the one student who owned a car. It

was probably during these expeditions that I revealed to him my ambition to work in a museum one day. Towards the end of my first year Roger helped me to find me a voluntary placement at my local museum, the National Museum of Wales. Here I spent six weeks of my summer vacation helping catalogue a group of stone tools from Pontnewydd Cave.

On my return to Lancaster I presented Roger with my selection of courses for the final two years of my degree. On seeing I had reverted to my original fascination with the Romans he took a blank course selection form, completed it and handing it back to me with my original form suggested I should go away for an hour and return with the one I really wanted to do. I did as I was bid and saw that Roger's selection included all the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic course options, whilst still allowing me to do the core Roman courses too. I realised that perhaps he knew something I did not, so when I returned it was his form I asked him to sign. From then on Roger was always interested in my progress. He recommended museums I might like to volunteer at during my holidays and excavations of caves where I could work on finds that would help boost my C.V. and prepare me for that future museum job.

During my second year, I missed the class on drawing a flint handaxe due to a minor spell in hospital; Roger invited me to have a tutorial with him so I would not lose the marks. An hour after the start of the lesson Roger was still busily absorbed in explaining how to draw it and I had still not touched the pencil. Another half hour and he remembered having a lecture to give so left me with just the shading in of the flake scars to complete and a scale to add. I had the nerve to submit 'my' handaxe drawing for marking and he gave himself 68% for his efforts.

A year after I completed my degree Lancaster University closed its Department and Roger transferred across to Nottingham University. We kept in touch and he helped me continue my volunteering by helping to arrange a placement for me at the British Museum's Franks House. Four months later I was starting

a new job in the National Museum of Wales and from then on he would come to visit me in Cardiff about twice a year. Roger would always slip gently back into being my tutor showing and explaining in his ever patient way new things he had observed in the collections he was examining. Roger would often insist on having a collection tipped out onto the bench and would draw me into helping him to sort it all out. A search for the prepared butts *talons en éperon* on blades ahead of his Gough's Cave publication was particularly memorable as we tipped out box after box of flints from all the main Late Upper Palaeolithic Welsh cave sites. The aftermath took me a couple of days to sort out but Roger had, as always, kept each site together but now boxed differently having also criticised my method of putting flints into individual plastic bags and not adopting a more researcher friendly storage system.

At the end of each day we would return to my home for a glass or two of red wine, we would perhaps go out for a curry at the Indo-Cymru, his favourite curry house in Cardiff, and then back home for more red wine and talk of flints. I miss Roger's visits. I would save up all my queries into a box in readiness for his next visit and he would always oblige by helping me to

identify them. Roger had an incredible memory for detail.

His involvement with The Ancient Human Occupation of Britain Project commenced ten years ago and was the dream job for him, providing him with bases at both the British Museum and Natural History Museum. This was the job he should always have had, so he was in his prime at his end. AHOB gave him reason to travel back and forth to Cardiff and Swansea regularly as he and Tom Higham redated first Coygan Cave and then Paviland Cave, always taking just one piece of his puzzle at a time, never rushing and always excited to reveal by telephone what the new date he had obtained meant before asking for permission to sample just one more bone.

Roger's knowledge and understanding of the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic, of lithics as well as bones, was unique. He was drawing many strands together as he finally began to put pen to paper with his meticulous script during his final ten years. His willingness and generosity in sharing this knowledge with everyone was abundant and his final papers, still in press, are keenly awaited.

*Elizabeth A. Walker*