

Tony Lewis, 1946-1999

Jonathan Cotton

WITH THE untimely passing of Tony Lewis, through cancer, west London archaeology has lost a stalwart friend. Look back through the various reports from that quarter over the last twenty years and more, and his name crops up again and again, usually, and characteristically, in a 'behind-the-scenes' role. A modest man, he never pushed himself forwards or sought credit even when -- as in his meticulous and highly professional reconstruction and restoration of pottery vessels -- such credit was properly his and thoroughly deserved.

A keen pot-holer and promising leg-spinner in his younger days (he represented Lancashire Schoolboys), Tony left Fleetwood School aged 16 and came to London in the early 1960s, where he worked his way up the printing departments at the Admiralty and later the LSE. Health problems forced his early retirement, since when he had devoted himself virtually full-time to archaeology -- a boyhood passion, and one reinforced on the circuit digging scene of the late 'sixties and early 'seventies.

He was perhaps most in his element during the work the west London team carried out in Uxbridge in the 1980s, for here the programme of excavations fully engaged his encyclopaedic knowledge of archaeology, local history and of course pottery, of which the town produced large quantities. His deep love of ceramics, and of antique prints and watercolours, extended to the salerooms, which

he scoured with alacrity on a limited budget. It was astonishing how much he managed to cram into a series of small flats. There was not a surface, either horizontal or vertical, which didn't house some treasure, and each piece had its own particular story about how it had been discovered and purchased. He was quietly if justifiably proud, for instance, in having recently recognised a watercolour of 'an unknown gatehouse' as a view of one of the medieval gates of Winchester, though failing health prevented him from attending the opening of a prestigious exhibition in that city of which his new find was the centrepiece. Happily, his pride and joy, a collection of over 400 Dutch and English delftware wall tiles and other pieces, on which he lavished much time, skill and expertise, has been given in its entirety to Norwich Castle Museum by the National Arts Collection Fund, and will stand as a lasting tribute to his memory.

Tony Lewis was a private person and often diffident in company, but he was a good and true friend to those of us who knew and worked closely with him over the years. He was never comfortable being the centre of attention, or particularly interested in receiving public recognition of his achievements, and I can picture him rolling his eyes and shifting uneasily in his seat at these few words, but I make no apology for them. He is survived by his elder sister Clare and younger brother Chris ('our Kid'), to whom our sympathies are extended.

