

Obituary

Caroline Rosa Wickham-Jones, MA MSocSci FSA HonFSAScot MCIfA

25 April 1955 – 13 January 2022

Caroline was a prolific, dedicated and accomplished academic of Scotland's prehistory with an exemplary publication record. She was an innovator and leading scholar of the earliest post-glacial settlement of Scotland, of submerged prehistoric sites and landscapes around Scotland, and of the intimate relationships between people and the environment, sharing information through an impressive dedication to public engagement. Her research received hundreds of thousands of pounds of funding and she presented the results at local, national and international conferences for over 30 years. Importantly, Caroline had the most fundamental openness, warmth and ability to enthuse and inspire as she quietly achieved this lasting legacy. Her death, after a short illness, was so unexpected and cruelly cut short all that she had yet to give and experience. In all of her work and life she was driven by a passionate conviction that archaeology mattered, that it offered a powerful tool for thinking about the present, the future and the past.

Caroline made the beginnings of what was to be her incredibly full and rich career studying archaeology at Edinburgh University under Stuart Piggott, Trevor Watkins and Roger Mercer. Practical museum, survey and excavation experience were part of the degree and so, in 1975, she went as a student to the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland (NMAS). There she helped in post-excavation tasks for David Clarke's 1972–3 Skara Brae excavations, and so began her long-term attachment to Orkney. From the start, whether cleaning bones or laboriously sorting the wet-sieving residue from the site, she demonstrated all those qualities that were to be

her trademark: boundless enthusiasm, virtually unflagging good humour, a wonderfully meticulous eye for detail and a powerfully innovative research mind.

The talent Caroline had for research shone through at an early stage. In her undergraduate MA thesis she honed her skills working on the lithic assemblage from the Skara Brae excavations. As part of that study she employed use-wear analysis, a specialism still in its infancy at that point. She had regular opportunities to return to Orkney, graduating to a site supervisor post for the four seasons of David Clarke's Links of Noltland, Westray, excavations. There Caroline showed her ability to encompass the micro and macro scales of archaeology, whether painstakingly excavating a flint-working floor or displaying her writing skills in extensive, detailed and colourful trench diaries.

Caroline's work on these Orkney excavations led to a post at the Artifact Research Unit (ARU), at the NMAS, now the National Museum Scotland (NMS). This was the perfect place for young archaeologists to explore new ways of interpreting the material culture of the past. Caroline worked there from 1977 to 1988, holding responsibility for the daily running of the Unit. She took to it like a duck to water and used the facilities to widen her research network and participate in, and communicate about, various pieces of groundbreaking work.

One such project, in 1982, involved Caroline joining a small experimental archaeology team initiated by the Institute for Prehistoric Technology, Östersund, Sweden. For one week, Caroline, Ann Clarke and Andrew Barlow from the NMS, along

with a number of Swedish archaeologists, lived according to a hunter/fisher/gatherer lifestyle on the shore of Lake Lille Avasjö, Västerbotten, Lappland, a project recorded and now available on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lomNB3vLoEM>). The activities included hearth building and maintenance, tent building, fishing, making tools and butchery of a reindeer carcass. The experiences and lessons learnt from the week living the Mesolithic was published in 1986 in a thoughtful article that considered the material signatures of living in this fashion and the differences between lab-based and field-based experimental archaeology. Ever one for adventure, Caroline developed the trip into a three-week journey through Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark, involving five ferries, four trains, several buses, and a rowing boat across a lake. Museums and archaeological sites were visited at each stop – as Ann Clarke remembers:

We enjoyed the hospitality of many archaeologists along the way. Looking back to over 40 years ago I still appreciate the experience gained during that week – in gathering and processing our food as well as working materials in an outdoor setting to make essentially our own archaeological site.

In 1984 Caroline became director of her first major project: the excavation of a Mesolithic site at Kinloch, Isle of Rhum, having decided to focus on the Mesolithic, a period that she realised had been seriously understudied and unappreciated:

One reason for the lack of Mesolithic material was the lack of archaeologists working on it. Quite apart from the fact that it was the period that interested me most, I have always thought that I made a canny move setting out to study the period that most people found boring. It meant that whatever I did was likely to make an impact. (Blog 25 October 2015)

And what an impact she made. With her previous experience of island excavations on Orkney, she had no problem in organising three seasons with around 30 diggers, tools, kitchen equipment, food, bags and tents taken by coach and lorry



ILLUS 1 Enjoying a drink by Lake Lille Avasjö, Västerbotten, Lappland in 1982. (© Ann Clarke)

from Edinburgh to Mallaig and onto an old fishing boat across 20 miles of open water to Kinloch Bay on Rhum. The excavations at Kinloch were an important catalyst that reinvigorated Scottish Mesolithic archaeology in the 1990s, producing the earliest radiocarbon dates for Mesolithic settlement at that time and setting research agendas for subsequent approaches to regional lithic technologies in the decades that followed. Ahead of the game in post-excavation, nascent computing technology with programming by Dominic Powlesland was used to record the 140,000 flaked lithics on handheld devices. The influence of the Rhum project can be directly seen in other longer-term Mesolithic landscape projects, such as those developed by Steven Mithen on Islay and other Inner Hebridean islands, and in the growing professional recognition of the

archaeology of the period as it grew from being regarded as ‘boring and of little consequence’ to its vibrant and diverse present state. Her passion for this deep past recently extended further back into Scotland’s elusive Late Glacial archaeology, and in a conference talk at Meso’2020 with Kate Britton and Torben Ballin she outlined what would surely have been her next *cause célèbre* of overlooked archaeology.

Ever able to communicate the results of her work to a wide audience Caroline, together with the co-director Dave Pollock, produced two fine booklets, *Rhum: The Excavations*, based on the annual results. Within four years she had also brought together a monograph for this Society, *Rhum: Mesolithic and Later Sites at Kinloch: Excavation 1984–86*, confirming her reputation for timely publication. Nationwide publicity for Rhum was also gained when pollen identified on a Neolithic sherd from the site led Brian Moffat to interpret the original pot contents as a type of mead. This led to a fruitful collaboration with William Grant and Sons, who recreated the brew, held a competition to name it, and got it onto prime-time TV with Terry Wogan tasting it live on air – all long before the likes of university impact statements were heard of. Rhum was also Caroline’s first experience of underwater archaeology, when she organised a group of divers to survey the bottom of Kinloch Bay to assess sea level change and its impact on the Mesolithic occupation.

Having completed the Rhum monograph, Caroline decided to broaden her horizons. She left the ARU, enrolled for a Masters degree in Heritage Management and became the Executive Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. At the same time she wrote reports on lithics for excavations and made determined efforts to facilitate integrated approaches to the natural and cultural environment. From the late 1980s onwards, Caroline liaised with an ever-widening spectrum of organisations and individuals, and her networking skills and fresh thinking were notable. She suggested that the Society would add value to and benefit from membership of Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Link, the umbrella body for voluntary organisations working on

environmental concerns. Representing the historic environment, along with the then Council for Scottish Archaeology, she brought her deep knowledge of land and seascapes to organisations such as the RSPB, Scottish Scenic Trust, Scottish Wildlife Trust and the Marine Conservation Society.

At much the same time Caroline became a trustee of the John Muir Trust (JMT), encouraging a commitment to land management informed by a knowledge of past land-use. So it was that archaeological field surveys were commissioned by the JMT to aid decision-making, such as that across their land in southern Skye. In 1991 she became a board member of Nature Conservancy Council Scotland. Caroline was always disappointed that her influence was not sufficient to ensure a commitment to the historic environment by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), the body that was about to replace it, even though the Forestry Commission had already taken that step. But her commitment to integrated environmental sustainability was not diminished, as is evidenced by two of her books, *All Natural Things: Archaeology and the Green Debate* (with Lesley Macinnes) and, over a decade later, *Fear of Farming*.

Despite all these other commitments, Caroline remained focused on Mesolithic studies, whether on land or offshore. In 1994 her popular book *Scotland’s First Settlers*, infused with her unparalleled knowledge of the Mesolithic, was published with its evocative reconstruction drawings by Alan Braby. This continued a tradition that began in collaboration with Dave Pollock and remained significant throughout Caroline’s career – a determination to help us all visualise the past by commissioning artists to recreate the everyday.

In 1993, as she was preparing *Scotland’s First Settlers*, she started her university lecturing career. She shared her ever-increasing knowledge of the early prehistoric period, Scotland’s archaeology in general and its management and public interpretation with students at Wye College, the University of Edinburgh, the Department of Continuing Education at the University of Aberdeen, and latterly as a Lecturer in Archaeology (2009–15) in the University

of Aberdeen's newly formed Department of Archaeology. At Aberdeen Caroline was well-loved as a lecturer and colleague and, even after stepping back from teaching in 2015, she remained a committed and valued member of the department, helping organise legendary field trips to Orkney. Her academic determination to publish was reinforced across these decades, represented not only by the books, booklets and edited volumes referred to here but also by the 53 journal articles, 28 book chapters and numerous magazine articles and columns that she wrote, including those for *British Archaeology*.

Always eager to learn herself, Caroline frequently turned her attention and formidable skills to new areas of research and interest. Fascinated by current affairs and the diverse histories of cultures around the world, she had already become both an intrepid traveller – latterly a tour guide – and a staunch voice for social equality. At home, she became a Founding Fellow of the Institute of Contemporary Scotland, committed to stimulating awareness and discussion of social, economic and cultural issues affecting Scotland and Scots. Among her personal travels, perhaps Caroline's most memorable venture was in 1988 when she followed the Silk Road and then returned on her own by train from Beijing (before modern tourism was *de rigueur*). She also visited the Middle East and went to South America, at least partly to study hunter-gatherer sites in Chile and Argentina. Other travels closer to home were also a rich source of inspiration: to St Kilda, Scandinavia and Ireland; to conferences here and abroad; and regularly to what was to become her home, Orkney.

Caroline moved to Orkney in 2002 with her young son Guille. From her new base she was determined to continue contributing to academia and wider environmental and social discussions. She became an integral part of Orkney society: a board member of the Orkney Archaeological Trust, Orkney Countryside Access Forum and, a decade later, Orkney Marine Heritage Forum and Orkney Heritage Society. Caroline was also intimately involved in developing the detailed research agenda for the Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Site that was published in 2005.

Typically, she then transformed it into something much more accessible, *Between the Wind and the Water*, which focused on the story of this geographical heart of Neolithic Orkney, suffusing great academic insight with her wonderful and accessible prose.

Caroline excelled at securing funding for projects that were close to her heart and bringing them from conception to final published form in admirable timescales. In the late 1990s and early 2000s her major project was 'Scotland's First Settlers', funded by Historic Scotland. Co-directed with Karen Hardy (and initially Bill Finlayson), fieldwork was undertaken from 1998 to 2004, and was published in full in 2009. This project explored the seascapes around Skye, a largely ignored geographical area for research. George Kozikowski, Martin Wildgoose, Steve Birch and others became involved. Miles of coastline were walked, searching for used rock-shelters and caves, and hundreds of test-pits were dug on raised beaches. They discovered numerous new sites and excavated a number of them. Their results and interpretations critically shifted attention to the experience of Mesolithic lives in island and highland landscapes.

An unparalleled knowledge, passion and collegiality regularly enabled Caroline to recognise new opportunities for collaboration. So it was that in 2006 she turned her attention to the archaeology below the waves through the Rising Tides Project, one that continues today. She was awarded a prestigious Leverhulme Research Fellowship (2011–13) to help establish this innovative project. Her interest in submerged archaeology and her first forays into the water were encouraged and supported by Sue and Alistair Dawson. Together they began the investigation of the Bay of Firth, close to her home. This work quickly expanded, with the inclusion of Richard and Martin Bates, to incorporate extensive geophysical survey of the seabed and palaeolandscape interpretation. This initially focused on the search for traces of submerged Neolithic structures, which had been hinted at by divers' tales from the area. However, the team quickly realised that, due to the bedrock geology, this was easier said than done. What the research

did reveal, during a decade of coring and analysis, was the presence of a drowned landscape that included freshwater lakes and marsh areas dating back to the Mesolithic period.

There were aspects of the fieldwork that Caroline did detest. Martin Bates remembers: ‘early on in the Rising Tides Project she was taken on a bog-trotting coring day. She vowed never to repeat that particular exercise again.’ Over time the research expanded into the Lochs of Stenness and Harray and into the Bay of Ireland on the edge of Scapa Flow. Caroline soon realised that the work in the Loch of Stenness contextualised the Neolithic sites of the Brodgar peninsula within a broader landscape – the first time this had been done. The ongoing results were presented at conferences, published academically and included in her last book, *Landscape Beneath the Waves: The Archaeological Investigation of Underwater Landscapes*. This valued academic tome focused on scientific approaches to submerged archaeological research, with case studies from across the world – no mean feat from Orkney, although made much easier by her continued links with the University of Aberdeen.

Caroline’s passion for sharing ideas through writing never ceased, from *The Landscape of Scotland* to a regular magazine column in *British Archaeology*, as well as various guidebooks on Orkney’s archaeology. However, the contributions she most enjoyed producing were probably her regular, award-winning series on BBC Radio Orkney from 2003 to 2009, and her own inimitable blogs. Her commitment to and love of archaeology were at the forefront of all her posts:

*Archaeology will enrich your life. Whatever you do ...
(Blog 12 June 2019)*

Caroline also always thought about the diverse spectrum of people that archaeology could attract if given the chance, a subject tackled in her last ever blog post:

We live in a diverse world. Diversity existed in the past. Archaeology is a diverse profession. Surely we do not need to make much of an effort to reflect that in all we do? (Blog 5 January 2022)

Rarely has archaeology had such an eloquent and informed champion. It is a pity that as a discipline we did not always make more of Caroline’s ability and desire to communicate to the masses and to inspire a vast range of people, an ability that made her a wonderful educator and researcher. More than most things, Caroline loved engaging with her students and other people from all sorts of backgrounds. Her natural enthusiasm won people over in public and private. She was involved in extensive and engaged correspondence with professional and avocational archaeologists as well as artists and journalists alike, offering advice and interest. Novelist Margaret Elphinstone’s memories are characteristic:

When working on my book *The Gathering Night*, set in Mesolithic times, Caroline became an amazing consultant-in-chief. It wasn’t long before I moved into her house for weeks at a time, with access to her amazing library, and a place on her dig at Long Howe.

For Caroline the personal and professional were always entwined. In 2003 she travelled to Chile to visit family and friends as well as be involved in a co-organised conference session comparing hunter-gatherer archaeology north and south at the International Congress of Americanists. As Nyree Finlay recalls, her own paper eagerly anticipated 21st-century Scottish Mesolithic work: ‘But it was experiencing the Mesolithic that mattered and the sharing of shellfish, including exquisitely cooked limpets, in downtown Santiago really brought folk together.’

Caroline was always challenging herself and others. Long before penning lithics policy guidance for Historic Environment Scotland and the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers a couple of years ago, she championed field methodologies for the discovery and excavation of lithic scatter sites. She was also particularly appreciative of the profound impact of longstanding regional biases in Mesolithic studies and the need to recognise and celebrate Scotland’s distinctive post-glacial archaeology on its own terms. She successfully negotiated these tensions as co-chair of the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic ScARF panel and

more recently has contributed to many of the regional studies.

Involving volunteers was critical to the success of Caroline's many fieldwork projects and with it the nurturing of local talent and more enthusiasm. The spotlight really shone on this engagement during the projects she was most recently involved with, along the River Dee in Aberdeenshire. With the Universities of Aberdeen, Stirling and Dublin, she investigated Mesolithic lifeways in the uplands of the Cairngorms, providing the first detailed evidence for Mesolithic upland land-use in Scotland. She also worked along with community volunteers, Cameron Archaeology and the University of Aberdeen on the innovative Mesolithic Deeside project, which has been run by local volunteers to give an unprecedented insight into landscape use in the Mesolithic and later prehistory along this major river system in Scotland. Caroline brought together the thousands of hours of research that the volunteers had committed to produce a detailed and authoritative account of the prehistory of the Dee in an online Scottish Archaeological Internet Reports publication.

Throughout her career Caroline enjoyed many academic friendships, nurtured via field projects and through conference presentations. Collaborations continued with visiting scholars coming to Scotland, bringing novel insights into midden methodologies and temporary structures, world heritage site management and contemporary writing, to name but a few. The conviviality of these events, excursions, site visits, meals and late-night conversations are legendary. Caroline continued to rekindle the proverbial campfire at every opportunity. Her energy and articulate enthusiasm linked to a deep knowledge will be sorely missed by all who had the good fortune to know her and share some of her journey. The outpourings of love and respect



ILLUS 2 Out in the Orkney landscape about 2015.
(© Guille Lopez)

on her Facebook page, on wider social media and numerous obituaries in the popular press are testament to Caroline's standing in life and in archaeology. The placing of her obituary in *The Times* would have particularly tickled her, being juxtaposed with that of Michael Lee Aday, *aka* Meat Loaf. While there was a gulf in their professions, lifeways and politics, Caroline would have smiled and laughed about being opposite an ageing and maverick rock star, a description that, after a gin or two, she might have labelled herself with. All in all, Caroline has left us with a remarkable legacy of cutting-edge Mesolithic academic research, public understanding and engagement and an inspirational life well lived.

MARTIN BATES, RICHARD BATES, KATE BRITTON FSAScOT, ANN CLARKE, SUE DAWSON,
NYREE FINLAY FSAScOT, JILL HARDEN FSAScOT, LESLEY MACINNES FSAScOT,
GORDON NOBLE FSAScOT AND LEKKY SHEPHERD FSAScOT

PUBLICATIONS LIST

Caroline wrote numerous articles for *British Archaeology* and the *Scotsman*, as well as occasionally for magazines such as *History Scotland* and *Current Archaeology*. She also authored leaflets and booklets, and created her own blogs – see www.mesolithic.co.uk (accessed 22 March 2022).

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