

## **A later-20th century mould for casting a Bronze Age from the north-east of England; A Life of Colin Burgess.**

**(3rd September 1938 - 18th November 2014)**

*Roger Miket*

### **HIS EARLY LIFE**

Colin Brian Burgess was born at Fulham Hospital, London on the 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1938, the first child of Phyllis and Horace Burgess of Pimlico. His first birthday coincided with the outbreak of war with Germany, an event that would have a deep impact upon his young mind, and shape his early relationships with those around him. As his father was then an engineer in the Territorial Army and therefore amongst the first to be called up to fight, the next six years were to leave both a vacuum in the household, and an imbalance in parental upbringing. Horace was physically a large man, and despite the close attachment and affection towards his mother that was lacking for an absent father, it is the latter that stood out in Colin's memories. Horace had begun his working life as a council worker, but by the outbreak of war he was working in a bakery as a pastry chef. Horace had a good war, and it liberated him. To his innate practicality, its hazards exposed a stratum of courage that gained him the Military Medal for bravery in Norway in 1940 and the DCM in 1944. The rise of council worker Horace, first to Sergeant Burgess then to Captain Harry Burgess might have continued into a peacetime service but for Anzio, where serious injuries put an end to his hopes of re-enlisting. The final year of his war was spent guarding Italian prisoners.

Horace returned to a household now increased by the birth of daughters Beryl (1940), Geraldine (1942) and Diane (1946), and a son he was a stranger to, grown into a pupil attending St Barnabus Primary School, Pimlico. Colin thrived in an environment that supplied the fellowship and personal encouragement so absent from home life. It is significant that the teachers who nurtured his youthful imagination and a belief of potential hopes fulfilled were all remembered by their first names: Tommy Warren, the Headmaster who had been sprint champion until an unfortunate accident, and Ken Rudolph, who taught English but was better remembered for his passion for transport memorabilia. It was his class teacher, Miss Wilson, however, who remarked with great prescience that she would not be surprised were the young boy to turn to archaeology as a profession.

In 1949 further disruption occurred when he left St Barnabus to begin at Westminster Grammar School, a change that coincided with the family's move to Battersea. As the pupils were drawn from a wider geographical area, Colin had few friends around his new home. He quickly learned to always keep one eye open for bullying, and to survive on his wits. It was here in 1951 he met Bill Heath, who became his best and lifelong friend.

## THE YOUNG STUDENT

His quick mind and intellectual curiosity invited the offer of a place at University College, Cardiff in 1957 to study in Honours Archaeology, choosing Latin and History as his first year options. Even as a first year student Colin demonstrated a readiness to challenge accepted assumptions. In an early essay he showed that, contrary to the prevalent view that Bronze Age pottery types reflected a sequence that was buttered across the whole of the Bronze Age, their associations and the few C14 dates then available demonstrated a rather more restricted spread, one confined largely to the earlier part of the period. Such a potentially promising career was almost halted at the outset when, at the end of his first year he failed Latin. Although allowed to re-sit (which he passed), a question-mark hung over whether he would be allowed to continue in Honours, or transferred to a General Degree.

The first week of his second year (1958) proved pivotal, for, in one of those serendipitous twists of fate, it happened that every one of the students signed up for the second year in archaeology had withdrawn from the course. Colin alone remained. This year coincided with Richard J.C. Atkinson's appointment as both its first Professor of Archaeology and Departmental Head, and the embarrassment of a department without at least one student seemed imminent. Summoned before Professor Atkinson, Colin was 'invited' to continue as the only archaeology student of that year.

Sensing Colin's interest in the Bronze Age, Leslie Alcock suggested he might consider examining the bronzes of the Thames Basin (between Erith and Teddington) for his undergraduate dissertation. A major source for this was the Leyton Collection of Bronzes, formerly housed in Brentford Public Library, but at the time held within the Museum of London collection at Lancaster House. The Director of the London Museum at that time was D. B Harden, son of an Irish bishop, and archetypal establishment man, who occupied seats on all the commissions. Colin found unexpected support from one whose patronage of public school boys was well known, but where scholarly intellect and industry merited, Harden could show unbounded generosity and kindness. Just after the war, the Museum of London had moved to Kensington Palace when the government requisitioned Lancaster House as a diplomatic venue. However, it retained storage there, allowing Colin the freedom not only to handle the material, but crucially, to lay out the bronzes at leisure for direct comparison, and to experiment with various typological arrangements of the material. The methodology so assiduously developed here was to serve him a lifetime. His rigorous, methodological approach, and a developed skill in technical representation of the individual objects, (*'If you couldn't draw it you wouldn't understand it'*), combined to lend his argument particular persuasion. And indeed, this was far from an empty field; others such as George Eogan and John Coles, - as well as Dennis Britten, with his interest in metal analysis, were at this time also busily interrogating bronzes for their stories.

In 1960 on graduating with a 2.1, he registered at Cardiff for a doctoral thesis on 'Aspects of the Bronze Age in Wales and the Marches'. At this time he met Frances Lynch, then studying megalithic tombs at Liverpool under Terence G. E. Powell. Her research made her a frequent visitor to the department at Cardiff, and thus began a friendship and collaboration in many a fruitful venture spanning over half a century. While at Cardiff he was engaged for a time to fellow student Catherine Johns. Although it was a relationship that did not last, it is a measure of them both that the respect they

held for each other meant their friendship was to endure across the decades, as Catherine's own career as an eminent Roman scholar working within the British Museum developed in parallel with his own. Colin was good at making and keeping friends, such as that with Francis Celoria, then a curator at the London Museum, and later lecturer in archaeology at North Staffordshire.

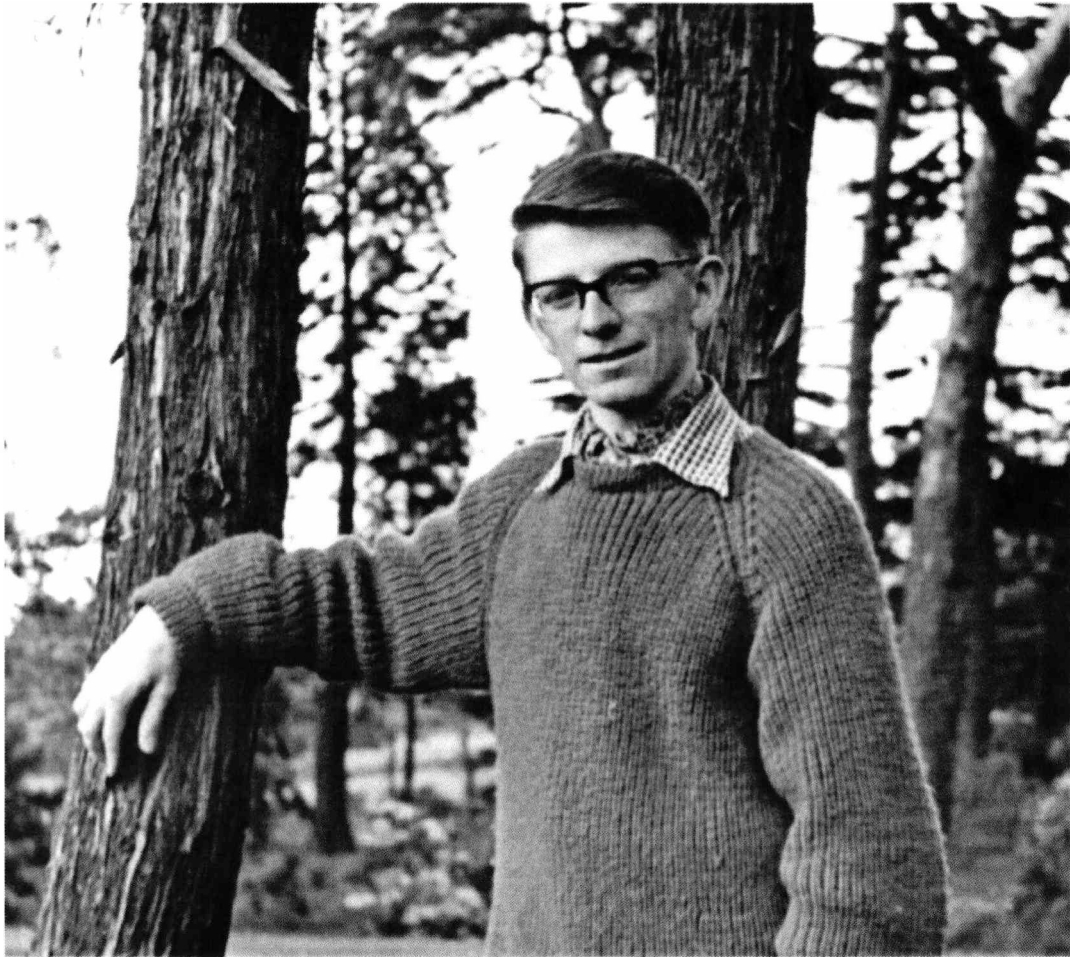


Figure 1. Colin in 1961.

Photo: © Catherine Johns.

By 1963, with his grant running out and his thesis still far from complete, it was clear to him he needed to find employment. Two opportunities presented themselves, the first being a new research post at the British Museum, which Atkinson was very keen that Colin accept. The other was a Research Fellowship (Sir James Knott) at Newcastle University to study the Bronze Age metalwork of Northern England. Although based in the Department of Classics, the post was the brainchild of George Jobey, then teaching archaeology in the Department of Adult Education, as an opportunity for someone to study the region's Bronze Age material culture as counterpoint to his own work on prehistoric settlement in the region. His choice of the latter was a bold decision, as the British Museum post would have placed him at the heart of a southern world he knew, and amongst colleagues and material with which he was familiar. England's northernmost city must have seemed to him by comparison an unknown and alien choice. Celoria was instrumental in reinforcing Colin's conviction that he would find himself little more than a dog's-body in the British Museum post, and so, much to the chagrin of Atkinson, in the autumn of 1963 Colin arrived in Newcastle as a Sir James Knott Fellow.

Colin did not have a happy time within the Classics Department. The worlds of classical archaeology and British archaeology were then more separated in terms of temperament, and Eric Fletcher, Professor of Latin and Head of the Department, made plain that he regarded this latest arrival into his domain as something of a cuckoo. The uneasy relationship deteriorated further when Fletcher peremptorily claimed Colin's room for what he thought was a more worthy incumbent. Fortunately Barbara Harbottle (Architecture) and Ron Tylecote (Metallurgy) found him a more congenial room at some distance from Classics. One consolation was that Colin's post required that he roam well beyond the university and into museum collections across Northern England. Indeed, he was allowed generous time as Fellow for visiting the various museum collections to interrogate the material, and at the same time, develop the network of contacts that eventually, over a lifetime, would embrace the whole of European Prehistory. Many lifelong friendships were founded on this, such as with Terry Manby, following Colin's visit to the Tolson Memorial Museum in Huddersfield to draw the Shelf Hoard of palstaves. This tour of northern museums was to be unquestionably important on several different levels. Colin clearly saw them, like the Leyton Collection, as the quarry for the materials that might allow him to raise a workable edifice of northern metalwork types, together with the insight they might allow on other aspect of society. The clear, precise and polite letters he wrote well in advance of his intended visit to each curator, - detailing exactly what he wanted to see, when he would arrive, and the length of his intended visit, - remain amongst his papers. Together with all the drawings made at the time, they are evidence of his structured and methodical mind. These 1:1 museum drawings and notes, (one object to a page) provide a rich resource for future scholars, with his drawings of northern material now in the Great North Museum, and the southern English material in the British Museum. A major archive is also available for Wales, material he revisited more than once during his career as his ideas developed and changed, emphasising the value of that solid foundation of factual record which was the hallmark of his scholarship.

Colin never expressed how he felt about venturing so far from the south to live in the north, nor of the cultural differences he surely experienced. He seems to have quickly adjusted to life here, but could certainly not have imagined that his short-term appointment would mark such a major turning point, both in his academic and personal life. In 1963 Barbara Harbottle had introduced him to one of her diggers, Norma Pearson, then training as a teacher at Northern Counties. In July 1965 Colin and Norma were married, and with his term of fellowship now at an end, the hunt was on for another job.

## HE EMBARKS ON HIS CAREER

Unfortunately the job market in archaeology at that time was thin. The only post remotely suitable was a temporary one, acting as replacement for John Wymer at Reading Museum. The museum, which was housed in the Town Hall, was more noted for its Romano-British collection focused upon Silchester than its Bronze Age material. It also shared its premises with the police, who used it both as a canteen, and for wrestling competitions once a week. With a new museum anticipated, the curator tried to restrict Colin's activities to the safe and unadventurous, such as coin identification, but only succeeding in giving him an early arena for his reactive nature.

Fortunately, in 1966, and only a year after having left Newcastle University, a staff tutorship came up in the Department of Adult Education. This, combined with Norma's salary as a teacher, provided a decent income for the young couple. Facilities were rudimentary and Colin straightaway set about gathering together the resources necessary to illustrate the courses he would be delivering. In this he was supported by Ronald Tylecote (Metallurgy), and Dr David Smith, curator of the Museum of Antiquities. Already familiar with Colin's earlier research on the museum's bronzes while a Sir James Knott Fellow, David encouraged him to publish what was to be one of his most notable publications, *'Bronze Age Metalwork in Northern England'* (Burgess, 1968a). Until this publication appeared the northern bronzes had largely existed in the literature only as accounts of individual bronzes, with rare regard for their place in a wider typology, exceptions being the work of J. D. Cowen, for whom Colin had enormous respect. *'Bronze Age Metalwork ...'* when it appeared, marked a watershed in studies of the north British material, in taking as its core the important collection of bronzes in the Museum of Antiquities, and considering them as a body, not only capable of typological arrangement but also metallurgical analysis, the latter through the kindness of his friend, Ron Tylecote in Metallurgy.

Further major productions were to follow; most notably his sons, Christopher in January 1970, and Simon in June 1971.

In those days Newcastle lacked a Department of Archaeology. It could offer British Archaeology as a subsidiary subject only by drafting George Jobey in from Adult Education. When an Archaeology Department was eventually created in 1972, it was achieved most economically by housing it on the top floor of the Museum of Antiquities and incorporating the museum staff (Dr David Smith and Charles Daniels as teaching staff; Roman); Martin Harrison appointed professor and Head of Department (Near Eastern Roman & Byzantine) and John Gillam (Roman) were drawn from Classics. This heavy weighting of the new department towards the Roman period was underlined by the only external appointment made, that of Kevin Greene (yet another Romanist), with George Jobey, now transferred from Adult Education, single-handedly carrying the burden of teaching the whole of prehistory. Many were surprised to find that Colin had not been offered a place within this new department as he already had a notable reputation as a Bronze Age scholar, however, such a move would have then left Adult Education without a lecturer to deliver an archaeology offering. Consequently, over the following twenty-six years, the Department of Adult Education provided the framework that regulated, but never restricted, his activities. It was a confinement that in some respects sat uneasily alongside the growth of his academic acclaim. He did apply for an internal teaching post at Southampton, and in 1977 for the Abercrombie chair of Archaeology at Edinburgh, awarded to Dennis Harding; and when George Jobey retired, the university did finally offer him a position in the Department of Archaeology. By then however it was too late, in the interim Colin had industriously carved out from a department that sat on the edge of the academic mainstream, a most effective and efficient instrument for Bronze Age enquiry, and the publications emanating from this platform consolidated his reputation as one of the foremost European scholars in this field. More prosaically, he hated sitting in meetings and dealing with the politics of academia, and the truth of it was he had just too comfortable a berth where he was. By his own admission, he confessed *'I was always in trouble with the university, as I always did things the way I felt they should be done'*. His *'managers'*, especially Ted Hughes and Ian Forster, speedily discovered that the way to get the best from him was

to give him his head. They were particularly supportive when, in the 1980s Colin developed an interest in the Near East and biblical history, and ensured the funding was available for him to study at first hand the early archaeology of Israel.

For the most part, the absence of many of the resources available to staff in internal departments had forced him to be imaginative in advancing his aims; he knew precisely what was required and the sort of structure that was needed to address it. However, working on the fringe of internal teaching meant he was denied the succession of students whom he could, for example, unleash to pursue aspects of his excavation archive, deploy in undertaking fieldwork enquiries, or set loose amongst the country's museum stores. The absence of that resource was to shape his aims, and in some respects circumscribe his activities. For example, when he gave up excavation in the early 1980s, it was, he explained, because he felt he was bad at it. However, it was not excavation wherein the problem lay, for as his records show, he was as meticulous in recording, and as methodical in the process as any of his day. Rather his problems and frustrations arose from not having the specialist support apparatus that comes with an endless stream of undergraduate and graduate students, and who may be allocated aspects of the excavation archive to research, thereby easing the burden of post-excavation work. This was something that George Jobey, working for most his career from the same department, had also experienced, yet at the same time his record of publications keeping pace with his fieldwork and excavation was exemplary. The difference might be claimed as a result of George working within a more local field, one in which the all the resources to elucidation lay readily to hand in local journals or an accessible landscape, while Colin, on the other hand, was gathering across the whole of Bronze Age Europe, dependent upon his network of continental colleagues to keep him informed of the latest discoveries. Reflection on the nature of the two however suggests part of the reason lay within their different natures. George worked alone and cut a solitary swathe through his field; his publications were almost entirely his own. Colin on the other hand was more gregarious; he enjoyed working and writing with others; he thrived on interaction and was never happier than when he could harness an interest amongst others. Apart from the all-too brief summer harvest of young archaeologists employed under Job Creation in the mid 1970s, his only support was a handful of dedicated and willing Adult Education students. Here however was his plus, for in these mature students lay the skills and range of experiences that underpinned and enabled many of his ventures. While brilliantly creative and a natural leader, he was not really the sort of manager who was much interested in the detail, neither was he particularly fiscally adept. However, he was a past master in identifying who would be perfectly fitted for these tasks, and for the most part was fortunate in his choices. Geoff Watmough, for example, the Departmental Administrator, proved a most calming hand in his project finances and introduced him to the benefits of the '*rainy-day fund*'.

He was an inspirational teacher, able to hold an audience in the palm of his hand through enthusiastic extempore presentations and visually captivating slides. He set great store by his slide collection, several 4-drawer filing cabinets brimful from his accumulated wanderings across Europe. Until digital photography lightened his burden, he never carried less than two cameras, with an assortment of lenses and associated gear. His profligacy in taking shot after shot was legendary. His slide filing system was a source of wonder to those who, by a simple 3-digit code, could be remotely directed to recover the precise slide he required.

## HE BEGINS HIS NORTHERN CONFERENCES

In the late 1960s Colin was determined to raise the profile of Newcastle archaeology through a series of weekend conferences, to be held annually in Newcastle, on aspects of European prehistory, and of the Bronze Age in particular. Supported by the Department of Adult Education, these were held in the vacations when student accommodation in the halls of residence became available. From the outset they were fully booked, and are remembered today not only as weekends of lively debate and fellowship, but also as the place where one previewed what were to be the dominant issues for debate in archaeology; e.g. 'Beaker People', climate change and volcanic activity. The latter in particular was, as Frances Lynch remarks, a most influential conference. Indeed, I have a vivid memory of leaving the hall with Ian Kinness following Colin's radical presentation on volcanic activity and climate change with Ian muttering worriedly, '*Colin has lost it*'. Yet within a few months, climate change was to be *the* dominant topic in archaeology. What to many may have appeared as an uncanny prescience, was however, testimony to the remarkably close knowledge he had of his subject, and his quick grasp of the issues that would drive the study's agenda within the discipline. The conferences he created were widely attended, many translating into British Archaeological Reports which remain key texts to this day.

- 1969. The Neolithic in the British Isles.
- 1971. Pottery and Settlement in the British Isles.
- 1973. Wessex, Mycenae and the Early Bronze Age.
- 1975. The Beginning of Hillforts.
- 1976. Settlement in the later Neolithic and earlier Bronze Age. (Subsequently published as 'Britain and Ireland in the Third and Second Millennium B.C.' Eds. Colin Burgess and Roger Miket. BAR Report No. 33, 1976)
- 1977. Bronze Age Hoards; Some Finds Old and New. (Subsequently published as Burgess, C.B. & Coombs, D. 'Bronze Age Hoards: Some Finds Old and New'. B.A.R. Report No. 67. 1979.)
- 1980. Megalithic Astronomy and Society. (Subsequently published as 'Astronomy and Society in Britain during the period 4000-1500 B.C. Eds. Ruggles, C.L.N. & Whittle, A.W.R.. BAR Report No. 88. 1981).

As is the way in archaeology, provocative ideas invite rigorous scrutiny, and many of the issues of the day that Colin played such a major role in advancing, such as the debate over the nature of the Beaker problem, - invasion *versus* the indigenous adoption of a package or of late prehistoric climate change as a major driver of social and economic change, have recently been placed back under the spotlight. In the case of both, a more nuanced reading of a considerable body of data not then available to Colin has greatly ameliorated the more radical position then advanced. (*See for example* Parker Pearson *et al.* 2018 & Tipping, R. 2016,).

## HE ESTABLISHES THE BRONZE AGE STUDIES GROUP

In the late 1960s and 1970s it became common for small groups of academics in Newcastle, as elsewhere, with common interests to come together and share their thoughts. This sometimes included presentations, but rather in the form of informal conversation, a stimulus to engagement and a sharing of ideas. One such group already of long standing at Newcastle was the Roman Frontiers Studies Group, comprising a

handful of regionally based Romanists who met together to discuss northern frontier issues. In 1976 Colin set up the Bronze Age Studies Group but with a wider remit. It began as a national gathering of friends and colleagues specializing in the period, who might meet informally to discuss present and future problems in Bronze Age studies generally. It was, from the outset peripatetic, allowing the host for that year to introduce the members to some of the sites of the region. By 1981 however, it had translated into an international gathering, with a third of the tours held in north-west Europe, from Spain to southern Germany and Sardinia to Amsterdam, with its matter correspondingly geographically more extensive.

Except for the Halle meeting in 2000, where he was absent due to a fall, Colin attended all the meetings, including that held in South Wales in 2013. During the Bavarian meeting in 2002 he was presented with an inscribed silver flask. The group continues to meet annually, and during the 2014 meeting in northern Spain, home of his favourite brandy, his health was drunk twice in rounds of local brandy following each dinner.

*(A more detailed account by John Waddell of the Bronze Age Studies Group appears elsewhere in this volume).*

#### HE CREATES NAG.

A major challenge confronting Colin was to find a way of securing the funds and manpower to enable the fieldwork and projected excavations he was keen to undertake in the north of the county. He also harboured a longing to return to Kilellan, Islay, and pick up the dormant thread of unfinished work there (see under 'His Excavations and Fieldwork'). The idea of a group with the avowed aim of, *'the advancement of the study of archeology by members of the public'* was born around a coffee table in 1972. Initially it was underpinned by those who attended his classes and whose appetite - whetted by the stories of evolution he described - were eager to break into the laboratory of fieldwork and excavation and become part of that story of revelation themselves. Later that year the Northumberland Archaeological Group (NAG) was founded, and it was with the excavations at Islay in 1973 and again in 1976, that NAG began their long and very active contribution to northern archaeology that continues to this day. Money was raised by holding jumble sales, with the diggers providing their own subsistence and accommodation costs. By this means, NAG built up a formidable collection of tools and equipment, and a sturdy sectional hut to house them in. Work at Islay was followed by another 'arms length' excavation of the remarkable Bronze Age timber enclosure at Meldon Bridge in Peeblesshire, a site that had been passed over to Colin by Historic Scotland in their belief that the aerial photographs might simply represent a tree line. Thus was formed one of the earliest 'Community Archaeology' groups in Northumberland, and over the following decades it was to underpin the excavation of many of the major prehistoric sites in Northumberland archaeology during the 1970s and 80s. With Colin as Archaeological Director, a committee of elected ordinary members and officers, including a President who served for three years, a lecture series was rapidly introduced, and NAG found itself providing the machinery that contributed enormously to the success of Colin's Northern Conferences. The choice of speakers and subjects set a stamp of innovative quality upon these conferences that, together with the swift publication of each, did much to raise the profile of NAG, as well as the Adult Education Department and the University generally.



By 1977 NAG felt up to the challenge of producing a newsletter. NAG News edited by Peter Topping, to inform the wider archaeological community of the results of what was by then an impressively widespread range of archaeological activities undertaken by the group. These were the nascent days of a professionally-led public involvement in archaeology, the first opening of this erstwhile arcane discipline to a wider general public involvement; and while this was to be reprised after a fashion in the late 90s and first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the form of Community Archaeology, the former was hallmarked by a close association with the higher education establishments, – Universities and Colleges of Further Education, who were just at that time embracing the emerging first flush of professional archaeologists. It was decided to issue a more formal journal. 'Northern Archaeology. The Bulletin of the Northumberland Archaeological Group' made its first appearance in 1980 as an annual publication that might complement the more illustriously pedigreed 'Archaeologia Aeliana' produced by the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle. Initially edited by Peter Topping and Sheena Crawford, it fulfilled a practical role as outlet for the burgeoning number of articles produced through the increase in regional archaeological activity then taking place. From the outset the editorial bar was set high and a succession of scholarly articles was to gain it a respectable reputation as a vital tool in the development of archaeological thinking during these early decades. Anne McSween's extended essay on the brochs, duns and enclosures of Skye, for example, was to stand as the sole detailed description and analysis of the Skye monuments for over three decades (MacSween, 1985). Thirty-eight years later Northern Archaeology still serves its readership.

The 1980s were in many ways for archaeology, a golden age. It was also a time of new government initiatives to tackle the problem of unemployment and stimulate growth. The most imaginative of the proposals was 'Job Creation', offering entrepreneurs with innovative ideas that might stimulate new jobs invigorate the economy and expand human welfare, access to the governmental funding to realise them. It was promptly seized on by Colin in the late 1970s as an opportunity for employing a number of talented, recently graduated archaeologists to assist in his grand scheme of archaeological revelation. By the late 1980s NAG was sufficiently confident within those fields it had ventured into to begin initiating projects with increasingly serious budgets. In 1980 it published *'The Prehistory of Tyne & Wear'* (Miket, 1984), a book edited by Steve Palmer, cataloguing all archaeological discoveries within that county and supported by a full apparatus of illustrations, distribution maps and plans. In 1994 internal disagreement NAG led to Colin relinquishing the post of Archaeological Director. Although a close association was maintained, NAG thereafter continued independently.

*(See Gordon Moir, elsewhere this volume, for an extended account of the earlier years of NAG.)*

## HE FOUNDS THE CHEVIOT CENTRE AND MUSEUM

It was not always easy to find accommodation in the vicinity of wherever the excavation was to take place, particularly so in the high season summer months and when the excavation coincided with the school holidays. Even when accommodation could be found, it was often in hotels and B&B's. This fragmented the team and limited the all-important social momentum. Colin's vision as remedy was of NAG having its own centre in north Northumberland, a place where the diggers could all be housed

together. He reckoned that if such a centre could generate sufficient income from forty-eight weeks letting to other groups to cover the costs of fifty-two weeks, this would provide four weeks free accommodation for the NAG diggers. This became a reality in 1977 when the redundant Glendale Rural District Council Offices became available. NAG formed a company limited by guarantee, gained outline planning permission for a field centre that would provide between forty and fifty bed spaces, and signed a twenty-one year lease. Work parties comprising NAG members and people employed through the Job Creation, began the task of converting the building into The Cheviot Field Centre, complete with kitchen, dining room, showers, a lecture room and dormitories. It even had a small museum, courtesy of cases donated by the Museum of Antiquities of Newcastle, housing an exhibition focusing upon the archaeology of the Glendale area. NAG employed permanent staff in the form of a manager, Kevin Danforth, with his partner as cook. It opened its doors for its first bookings in March 1979 and for four years, offered the NAG annual excavations homely accommodation, well suited to the convivial nature of the group. Although the early years' bookings looked promising for its future, sadly a combination of a changing financial situation – withdrawal of funding support from central government through county councils, management problems and the drain on time and distance to remedy these, ultimately led to its demise. (*For the history of the Field Centre, see Burgess, 1982*).

## HIS TOURS

In 1981 Colin began taking his students abroad to explore the archaeology of Europe and beyond. The geographic range for such a small venture remains impressive and offered an opportunity to see places one was unlikely to get to on one's own at a fraction of the costs charged by established operators. In addition to ventures throughout Europe, the group journeyed as far afield as Mexico, the Four Corners, Tunisia, Egypt and Nubia; France, Spain and Italy (multiple tours); Turkey and Greece; Sardinia, Sicily and Cyprus. On eleven of these, from 1988 to 2011, he performed a double act on coach microphones and on sites with Jon Coulston (*see Appendix*). The itinerary was always exciting, a blend of the familiar and the less familiar and because of their remoteness, many tombs, hilltop fortresses, stone quarries or petroglyphs had been little visited, even by other archaeologists. Moreover, through his reputation and extensive network of contacts, Colin was usually able to arrange access to those parts of sites and museums not normally open to the general public. Frequently, leading continental archaeologists would step in as guides. While Colin specialised in the Prehistoric material, he was equally enthusiastic about Classical sites, Mediaeval fortifications and Napoleonic battlefields. For a Prehistorian he had an immense image archive of Greco-Roman antiquities (on one tour of southern Turkey no less than 21 theatres were visited!). However, he was never happier than when scrambling down into chambered tombs.

Thirty-three years later, Colin was still leading his group abroad - latterly expanded to include a large southern English contingent, and renamed as 'Archaeotrekkers'. Only ill-health prevented him attending the final tour he had organized to visit the Etruscan sites of north-west Italy in 2014.

These tours had an unexpected but most valuable spin-off, in that they subsequently opened up opportunities for fieldwork in Sardinia (1982) and from 1985, in Portugal (*see below*).

## HIS EXCAVATIONS AND FIELD SURVEYS

Colin had begun excavation as an undergraduate student at Wyvascombe, Somerset under Graham Webster, and at Dinas Powys under Leslie Alcock. Here he remembered especially the excitement of finding rare fragments of 'E Ware', denoting contact with the Mediterranean world. At the end of his first year as Staff Tutor at Newcastle, he assisted Martin Harrison in his excavation of the church of St Polyeuktos at Sarachane, Istanbul, where he remembers the same pottery being carted away by the workmen by the barrowful. Notwithstanding the reputation he was gaining as an 'artefact man', Colin was clear that the greatest challenge confronting archaeologists then studying the period between the later 3rd and earlier 1st millennia B.C. lay in recognizing the hitherto elusive settlement landscape of this period. A conference held at Leicester in 1974 had only been able to summon up around five settlement sites and, without a more informed understanding leading to recognition and excavation of the homes and fields of this period, the distortion in the record would remain. Colin set about attempting to remedy this deficiency.

Colin's quest for the structural evidence had actually already begun some years earlier, arising from the discovery in 1954 by the London publisher, James Whittaker, of what was clearly Bronze Age pottery in association with stone structures at Kilellan on the Hebridean island of Islay. In 1954 and 1956 Whittaker and the Islay Archaeological Group began excavations, but sadly Whittaker died of a heart attack in 1957, and it was Colin's friend, Francis Celoria, who, together with Susannah Pearce, returned in 1959 to continue the work. Two years later, in 1961, the Islay Archaeological Group were again excavating at the site but now with Colin as Director. The logistical problems to mounting an excavation in such a remote location were daunting, and it is a measure of the effectiveness of NAG as an organisation that it was able to overcome this and permit Colin to return to excavate there in 1973 and 1976 (Ritchie, 2005).

It was, however, closer to home, that Colin hoped to resolve this stubborn issue. At the time George Jobey was gaining an enviable reputation as a '*One Man Royal Commission*' for his own fieldwork survey and excavation, albeit principally on sites of the first millennia BC/AD, but from which indications of an earlier activity had occasionally been detected. George's work was largely carried out in south Northumberland and along the coastal plain. Colin however, was drawn more towards north Northumberland's Cheviot Hills, and amidst what he characterized as one of the best preserved and richest archaeological landscapes in north-west Europe. With the Bronze Age richness of the cave at Heathery Burn in mind, he first began by exploring rock-shelter sites - Bowden Doors, Goatscrag and Roughting Linn, 1967-8 (Burgess, 1972). Thereafter he gravitated towards the scooped platform settlements of the uplands such as Little Hetha (1970, 1971 & 1972) and the hillfort at Ell's Knowe (1978), reasoning that the presence of timber houses within the defences there there might represent an early phase of settlement. Confounded in his hopes, he next turned to Fenton Hillfort (1971, 1972, 1974 & 1975) in quest of an early horizon, but here again without luck, despite the presence of early palisaded enclosures on the site.

At the time, George Jobey was re-evaluating earlier excavations undertaken in 1961 by Richard Feacham at Green Knowe, Peeblesshire, reasoning that this type of settlement - unenclosed round timber house platforms strung in linear fashion along the contour - might be precursor to the palisaded enclosures which in turn foreshadowed hillforts.

The excavations he carried out at Green Knowe in 1977 and 1978 (Jobey,1980) indeed confirmed this to be the case, establishing a later second millennium date for a type of site that was already recognized as geographically widespread throughout both the Scottish and English borders. It remained for Colin to identify suitable candidates within the Cheviots, and this was accomplished in an unexpected fashion when, he and I were out together fieldwalking through light bracken between Humbleton and Yeavinger Bell. Turning to call something to him, I tripped and tumbled head over heels into a hollow. Colin's concern turned to glee in an instant on realizing that the hollow into which I had fallen was one of a series strung along the contour like a string of beads. Following a foray northwards into Scotland to excavate a remarkable Bronze Age enclosure at Meldon Bridge, Peeblesshire (1974-5, 1977), Colin began excavations at Houseledge (and Black Law; 1979, 1980, 1981 and 1982) and confirmed it as a settlement of the Early/Middle Bronze Age date.

His Cheviot excavations marked his final seasons of excavation in Britain. By this time he had come to realize that despite the pleasure they gave him, and the new information they provided, it was becoming increasingly difficult to marshal together the resources to discharge the post-excavation part of the process. He had been fortunate in securing funding from the Scottish Development Department to employ Steve Speak for three years from 1978 to 1981 and bring his Excavation at Meldon Bridge to a stage where it might be published (Speak & Burgess 1999), as well as work that allowed Anna Ritchie to finally publish the work at Kilellan, Islay (Ritchie, 2005). However, the post-excavation responsibilities, including that of publication, for excavations stimulated by research initiatives rather than external threats usually supported by developer-funding, were invariably, (and correctly so), the responsibility of the excavator. In consequence, a number of his later excavations remain unpublished, including Hetha Burn, Ell's Knowe, Fenton Hill, Houseledge and Blacklaw.

As his excavation interests declined, his enthusiasm for field survey continued. His continental tours had opened up opportunities for fieldwork in Sardinia and, from 1985, in Portugal, with his largest project centred upon Évora, capital of the Alentejo District. The Évora Project was more than a tour because it lasted, in one way or another, from 1985 to 1993. It involved not only members of Colin's classes from Newcastle, but also professional colleagues such as members of the northern arm of the Royal Commission, on the Historical Monuments of England and universities in Britain and in Portugal. An immediate beneficiary would be the local authority, (Câmara) of Évora who were to be offered information on their heritage assets in advance of Portugal's joining the Common Market/European Union, and thus in expectation of considerable infrastructure spending and tourist activity.

The project was originally one of field-walking, in strict transects as was then popular in Britain, to observe and record landscape features and pick up finds, notably pottery, and note their concentrations. This was to lead to some excavation to elucidate monument types and a more detailed survey of enclosures and megalithic tombs. The field-walking was not notably successful because none of the participants were familiar with the modern Portuguese agricultural landscape and the cork forests, nor the post-Roman production of very Roman-looking pottery. With the megalithic tombs, the situation was far more straightforward by 1992 the Câmara received a record fully illustrated with plans and photographs of some splendid tombs, including many that had escaped the notice of Georg and Vera Leisner, the doyens of Iberian megalithic studies between

the 1930's and 1960's (Leisner, 1943-65), giving their condition, vulnerability and potential for economic tourism. The excavation of enclosures in the region was the focus of the later years of the project and this, too, produced some interesting published results complementing the work of local researchers.

On a personal level, the project established many British/Portuguese friendships and established Colin as a leader and scholar in this crucial area of the Atlantic Facade, whose importance to the pre-history of Western Europe was becoming increasingly recognised at this time.

## HIS PUBLICATIONS

It is undoubtedly through his considerable published output where we can best view the young Colin finding his stride; and, as the breadth of his interests increased, observe his themes broaden, strengthen and deepen (*see the bibliography that follows this article*). From 1962 onwards, a succession of publications appeared, written in an easy, felicitous style and accompanied by technically exacting illustrations from his own hand. As Frances Lynch has observed (Lynch, 2007), their understated titles - '*a socketed axe from Monmouthshire, and its significance on the Bronze Age in Wales*' - '*A Palstave from Chepstow with observations on the palstaves of the British Isles*', revealed his methodological quest for the wider Bronze Age world behind every single object. Each would find its place in the complex, interlocking framework he was erecting; a cohesive and detailed edifice of events in the Bronze Age, crucially strengthened through rigorous attention to the chronological dimension.

The insight to be gained from an awareness of the continental material had previously been made apparent in the works of such as Stuart Piggott and Christopher Hawkes. Inspired by the publications of Jacques Briard and Pierre-Roland Giot, in the company of his friends, George Rybatt and Francis Celoria, Colin embarked upon a tour of the monuments and museums of Brittany and Normandy. He met and stayed with both Pierre-Roland Giot and Jacques Briard who not only introduced him to French archaeology but to France in its wider sense, and crucially, introduced him to an appreciation of French wine. Giot and Briard became great friends and thereafter, as the circle of friendships widened, so began the invitations to French conferences, the interchange of publications and subsequent collaboration in writings on aspects of the continental Bronze Age. From as early as 1968, when his watershed essay on the relationship between the British and Continental material appeared, - '*The Later Bronze Age in the British Isles and northwestern France*', (Burgess, 1968b) - he made it both a duty to keep abreast of the latest continental discoveries, and a pleasure to maintain a frequent contact with his continental colleagues thereby consolidating his standing as an international scholar of some weight.

As his local and international authority grew, Colin became Colin Renfrew's obvious choice as author of the chapter on 'The Bronze Age' in what was to become the standard scholarly text of the 70s and 80s on '*British Prehistory*', (Renfrew, 1974). It led in turn, to what many regard as his finest publishing achievement, '*The Age of Stonehenge*' (John Dent, 1980). This was to be the first of an intended series, each written by keynote scholars, setting out for specialists and the interested layperson, the current state of knowledge of British Prehistory. For the series editor, Professor Dennis Harding, Colin, with his intellectual breadth and easy and agreeable writing style, was

the obvious choice for launching the series with a volume covering the period of Stonehenge. The outcome was a magisterial example of academic scholarship for a public audience. With numerous reprints and running to two editions (including an American edition) it remains to this day the best single overview of the period; a forensic *tour-de-force* in its analysis and ordering of a bewildering variety and range of detail into the one cohesive and compelling narrative. Little wonder that subsequent to its appearance, the quality of both undergraduate and graduate papers on the Bronze Age countrywide leapt dramatically. Colin's challenge was made possible by his ability to turn again to the bounty of 'Job Creation' as an instrument for realising his task. Putting together a book of such breadth within the time allotted (three years) required the support of amanuenses with a wide range of skills, not least being artists for the illustrations necessary to give the book its visual cohesiveness. Through this scheme Colin was able to employ an alarmingly large number of people, all officed within the walls of the Adult Education Department. Golden days indeed, for many of those who were yet to embark upon their own illustrious platforms in archaeology, obtained their first jobs in archaeology with Colin through this scheme. [Sabina Gerloff, the late Peter Hill (excavator of Broxmouth Hill Fort and Whithorn), Strat Halliday, Piers Dixon and Adam Welfare (RCAHMS), Anne McSween (Historic Scotland), Peter Topping (English Heritage), Alex Gibson (Leicester University), Gillian Varndell (British Museum), the late Ian Colquhoun, Angela Uribe de Kellet, Zilla Petit, Caroline Whickham-Jones and Angie Townsend]. A follow-up volume entitled '*From Henge to Hillfort*' was planned for Colin to write, taking the proposed series from the late Bronze Age up to the '*Age of Hillforts*'. Sadly, it came to nought and much of the preparatory material for it was lost in the disastrous fire in the department in 1979, by which time Colin lacked the energy to rebuild the loss. Several copies of the introduction to this volume survive in his archive, and provide an interesting commentary on how his ideas about the Bronze Age had changed since the publication of '*The Age of Stonehenge*' but nothing of the projected chapters. Sadly the comprehensive book on the Bronze Age, from both artefact and settlement perspective has never been written; certainly not with the density of evidence and reference that Colin would have provided.

## AS THE PRODUCER OF CORPORA

The nuts and bolts that held the framework of his view of the Bronze Age together were the artefacts, and here it is his work on the bronzes in particular for which he is perhaps most widely celebrated amongst specialists. It was an interest, and a facility that he retained throughout his life as evidenced by the continuous stream of 'Notes' on individual objects, and an indispensable corpora of defined categories and types of weapons. His first, on the '*Bronze Age Metalwork in North-Eastern England*' (1968a) arose from his time as Sir James Knott fellow at Newcastle. Others, were written in collaboration, such as those for *Prähistorische Bronzefunde*; '*The Axes of Scotland and Northern England*', (with Peter Karl Schmidt. 1981); '*The Dirks & Rapiers of Great Britain and Ireland*' (with Sabina Gerloff. 1981); and '*The Swords of Britain*' (with Ian Colquhoun, 1988).

## THE MAN

Colin wore his learning lightly, and in an age before search-engines, the gathering of it appeared to many of his colleagues almost invisibly acquired. Seemingly always fully engaged either in teaching, in gingering on others, in convivial social mode, or building

up a formidable library of books and articles, when he ever found the time to accumulate this well of learning was quite beyond fathoming. As the number of his publications with multiple authorships testify, he was very comfortable in working with colleagues, and always generous in sharing joint authorships, especially when this might help the up-and-coming. He was hugely personable, with an infectious sense of fun; partnering him on one of our tours, and after he had been experiencing problems in one eye, and me with a detached retina, at the airport he pulled two eye patches out of his pocket for us to wear, as both an 'encouragement' for extra assistance, but more so as symbolic of our piratical attitude to this continental venture.

Even in retirement, right up to the beginning of his final illness, his insight and command of the material remained undiminished. He followed each new discovery as it appeared and his network of contacts ensured he was alerted about any recent Atlantic European discoveries. For the bronze artefacts in particular, it is a measure of the system he had created that while some may surprise, there were few that seriously impacted upon the structure he had erected. When they did, his response was immediate. His final paper, written with the assistance of his great friend, Brendan O'Connor just two years before his death, is a major review of the chronology of the Middle-Late Bronze Age. Opening with a most comprehensive critique of what he had himself written over forty years earlier on the Later Atlantic Bronze Age, Colin then proceeded to raise a new and revised construction in its place (Burgess, 2012)

In 1992 he returned from work in Portugal to discover Adult Education offering early retirement. It was becoming clear that the university saw little future for this department, and so, like his colleague, Angus Lunn, Colin decided to take up this offer. Only the year before, Colin and Norma had bought a house at Ladignac-le-Long, Haute-Vienne in France, moving there four years later when Norma retired. In 2003 they moved again to Coussac-Bonneval, near Limoge, returning frequently to Newcastle to visit friends, and deliver a series of lectures on recent European developments in archaeology.

By the 1980s Colin was becoming somewhat disillusioned with the direction of British Prehistory, (see Introduction to the 2001 edition of his textbook, *The Age of Stonehenge*). The drift towards post-processualism then fashionable tested his very clear-held beliefs about what archaeology might, and could not, tell us; and while fully cognizant of the subjective nature of his discipline, he also knew well enough that whatever could be claimed without evidence could equally be rejected without evidence. Thereafter his contribution to British prehistory was limited largely to sharing his knowledge with those making new discoveries in the south-east of England. His interest had swung to matters continental, and this was where he now focused his attention.

Alongside his love of Mahler and chips, Colin had a long-standing and deep relationship with wine. It had begun many years before, leading to the founding of the Byker, Heaton and Hetton-le-Hole Wine Appreciation Society, a wine-tasting group that would meet for food and informal tastings. And of course, in a fashion that mirrored his approach to all artefacts, he began typologically arranging the wine labels into scrapbooks to inform him of their characteristics, relationships and of course, his preferences. Indeed, the only award ever given him was during a conference in Beynac, Dordogne in 1990, when, in the company of Jacques Briard and Jean Guilaine, he was



invested as a Chevalier of the Vinée de Bergerac. He held this in higher esteem than anything archaeology could have given him. His love of French wine was offset only by his passion for Spanish brandy, the quest for which became a minor subtext for him on each continental tour. Although a Fellow of both the Society of Antiquaries of London, and the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, for someone so cosmopolitan, he was a member of remarkably few archaeological societies. But then Colin was always the individualist, a huge personality, fiercely strong on friendships, and establishment convention - while in archaeology a vigorous revolutionary, rejecting outright academic hierarchies, (especially those prevalent in Continental circles), and ever ready to challenge convention and cast down the walls of received orthodoxy.



Figure 2. Colin aged 70. He is wearing the sash of a Vinée de Bergerac. It was presented to him in 1990 when he was elected to that company.



Colin's studies spread over more than half a century. They were begun in a different world, and where he was amongst the first of a new, post-war generation of professional archaeologists whose backgrounds stood in very marked contrast to that of the preceding generation who were largely from Oxbridge. Throughout the 60s and early 70s his generation was to spill out into universities, museums and colleges of education, and stimulate a more interactive, warmer public engagement with archaeology. He would listen to everyone; and there was always a place within his conference programme or in his Bronze Age Studies Group gatherings, for the *Young Turks* to present their ideas. All were welcomed in and made to feel valued, for his great kindness to all whom he recognized as being genuinely curious and eager to learn was unbounded.

In 2007 his friends and colleagues presented him with a festschrift, *'Beyond Stonehenge'*, edited by his son Chris (who had followed his father into archaeology), Peter Topping and his lifelong friend, Frances Lynch, (Burgess, C.G.P. et al, 2007).

Many people have noted with some perplexity that Colin never had the Ph.D. usually assumed to be held by a scholar of his standing, and it became a friendly joke amongst his circle of close friends that every other member of his family held a doctorate except Colin himself. In his residual archive, there is more than one unfinished version of a thesis on 'Bronze Age metalwork from Wales and the Marches', begun in Cardiff in 1964, but overtaken by the move north, and involvement in new projects. There is also a short correspondence, beginning in 1975 with Dr. Mike Jarrett about the new regulations under which a time limit on presentations was to be applied. This spurred Colin to some serious reviews of the work, but by 1980 both had agreed that his published work, and projects currently underway, were a better monument to his standing in British pre-historic studies than three little letters after his name!

## POSTSCRIPT

Remembering Colin is also to remember that no-one better exemplified the old adage that, *'Behind every good man ....'*. Colin would be the very first to admit Norma being the rock upon which his world rested and the enabler of so much of his achievement. Her constant support, encouragement, and, when necessary, restraint, was evident to all who knew them. When Colin was doing the round of the trenches during his excavations or writing up the records, Norma was there attending to the logistics that kept the whole wagon on the road, while in addition looking after their two young boys, Christopher and Simon - and Colin! A housewife and a mother certainly, but much more than that; a hugely independent and warm personality, committed to developing the career she had entered after teaching, gaining her doctorate, and as a mycologist. Always with a venture of her own, how she found time for her many other interests including running a playgroup, choral singing and as a successful painter was breathtaking. His friends didn't need to remind him how lucky he had been in marrying not just his best friend but his soul-mate, - how well he knew it, as he acknowledged at every turn.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All lives are complicated affairs, and few are privileged to observe the lineaments of a life fully lived in its entirety, either across time or in the round. The friendship arising

from our shared interest began in 1972, and over the following fourteen years at least once a month we would spend some time together in a shared passion for discussing the northern archaeological scene that between the 1970s and 1980s was especially active. Occasionally we would collaborate in publishing short articles on things that caught our interest and for the sheer joy of doing this together. The most enjoyable was of course the many hours we spent joint-editing the Festschrift to mark George Jobey's retirement, 'Between and Beyond the Walls...' (1983). This happy situation continued until I moved to Skye in 1986, when, in the way of things, our lives followed different paths. Though I believe we got on well, and I enjoyed his company immensely, we did not re-connect again until our return to Northumberland in 2002, by which time he and Norma were living in France. However, through his son Christopher, who was then working as the Northumberland County Council archaeologist, we re-connected, and, in the way of friendships formed before that age after which they are usually defined only as acquaintances, it was as if no interval had existed. Thereafter I saw Colin and Norma many times during their periodic visits here, as well as visiting them in Coussac-Bonneval. It was a delight to accompany him in a supportive role during his final three Archaeotrekking tours of Germany France and Italy, and of course we saw them much more frequently when they returned to the north-east, shortly before Colin's death.

It seems to me important to offer this brief outline of the moments we connected and the fulcrum of our relationship to better illustrate the partial nature of this account. Most facets of Colin's life and thinking were, and remain, opaque to me, and what is offered are just fragments from the fitful and periodic contact I experienced as our orbits interacted. Denied detailed knowledge of the day by day progression of his journey from child through student to family man, I also remain shamefully ignorant as to his politics, musical and literary interests, and about the many other things he would have regarded as important and influential on his life. My compromised perspective necessarily largely concentrates on aspects pendant on his academic life, and in this I have to believe he might have approved of what may otherwise seem a rather unorthodox representation of this as a series of inter-related themes, - the individual strands that together make up only the archaeological thread of his journey - and hopefully have smiled.

The contributions made by Dirk Brandherm, Norma Burgess, Catherine Johns, Frances Lynch, Terry Manby, Gordon Moir, Brendan O'Connor, Peter Topping, John Waddell and Adam Welfare were invaluable in shaping this vignette.

## APPENDIX.

Colin's Study Tours, compiled by Gordon Moir with additional information provided by Margaret Maddison, Sheila Day, Barbara Esslemont and Jon Coulston.

1981 Easter	BRITTANY with Lionel Masters
1982 Easter	FRANCE (Brittany to Arles) with John Casey
1983 Easter	WESTERN FRANCE (Dordogne, Perigord) with Chris Smith
1984 Easter	PYRENEES & CATALONIA with John Casey
1985 Easter	PORTUGAL with Isabel Lisboa
1986 May	LOIRE/BORDEAUX (wine and archaeology) with Mark Savage
1987 Apr-May	SOUTHERN SPAIN
1988 Easter	TURKEY with Jon Coulston
1989 May-June	CYPRUS South with Jon Coulston
1990 May-June	TURKEY (Lycia & Pamphylia) with Jon Coulston

1991 ?	
1992 ?	
1993 May	ITALY (Campagna/Etruria) with Jon Coulston
Sept	FRANCE (South) & NE SPAIN with Jon Coulston
1994 ?	SARDINIA
Sept	TUNISIA with Jon Coulston
1995 Oct	SPAIN (Gandessa/Ebro)
1996 June	SARDINIA with Anna Grazia Russu
1997 Oct	NORTHERN CYPRUS with Andante
1998 May	IRELAND
Sept	SARDINIA with Anna Grazia Russu
1999 Sept	SPAIN (Centre and Léon) with Jon Coulston
2000 Sept	USA (The four corners) with Pete Topping
2001 Sept	MYCENAE TO MACEDONIA with Jon Coulston and Hazel
2002 Sept	NORTH-EAST SPAIN (Galicia) with Jon Coulston and Marta
2003 March	MEXICO (Yucatan) with Raoul
2004 Sept	SICILY with Jon Coulston
2005 May	NORTHERN PORTUGAL
2006 May	SOUTHERN SPAIN (Andalucia/Granada)
2007 April	MENORCA with Richard Harrison
2008 May	IRELAND with Frances Lynch
Sept	SARDINIA
2009 April	SPAIN (Lleida and Teruel) with Richard Harrison (SARDINIA – trip organised by Prehistoric Society, led by CBB)
2010 April	SPAIN – EXTREMADURA
2011 June	LANGUEDOC via Barcelona with Jon Coulston
2012 May	BUS UP THE RHINE with Roger Miket
2013 April	FRANCE: CENTRE WEST & PAYS DE LOIRE with Frances Lynch and Roger Miket
2014 May	THE ETRUSCANS, led by Roger Miket with Emma-Jayne Graham.

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Time line of Colin's archaeological activities.

