

medieval ceramics **News**

Obituaries

Sarah Jennings FSA MIFA 1947–2009

Archaeologist: Ceramic and Glass specialist

The loss of Sarah Jennings, whose life was cut prematurely short, with an aneurism, has left her many colleagues and friends deeply saddened and shocked. Sarah was born in Ayrshire, Scotland. Later her father, a pilot, and his family settled in Henley, where Sarah grew up and subsequently attended St Helen's and St Katharine's, an independent school for girls, between 1958 and 1963, gaining 8 'O' levels; then 3 'A' levels from Abingdon, Berks College of Further Education. During her 1963-6 holidays, Sarah worked first as a volunteer in Winchester, where she became infatuated with archaeology, returning as finds assistant and finally finds supervisor. Later from 1966-69, Sarah was employed as a pottery researcher and senior finds supervisor at the Winchester Archaeological Unit.

Sarah who never married, had a somewhat individualist approach to life, coupled with lots of self reliance; in April 1968 she worked at Lezoux, France and at Siraf Iran, during the 1967-8 winter seasons, as finds assistant. From October 1969 to September 1974, as permanent assistant to the Director, Dr D B Whitehouse, she worked on glass, artefacts and pottery. Sarah also worked for periods in Benghazi, Libya, in

Khandahar, Afghanistan, Ras al-Khaimah and United Arab Emirates. From 1974 until 1992 Sarah built up her expertise on English medieval and later ceramics while working for the Nene Valley Research Committee, the Norwich Survey at the Centre of East Anglian Studies at the University of East Anglia, Lincoln Archaeological Trust, Passmore Edwards Museum Stratford, London and the York Archaeological Trust. This period saw Sarah publish a number of significant works on ceramic material of which by far the most important was *Eighteen Centuries of Pottery from Norwich*. (East Anglian Archaeol 13), still one of the most widely, referenced pottery publications in Britain.

In November 1992 Sarah joined the English Heritage Centre for Archaeology in Portsmouth where she was responsible for reviewing and monitoring applications for grants, tracking expenditure and writing specialist reports. It was in this position that her strengths and knowledge of medieval ceramics came into their own, as she took on the responsibility for pushing through a national research strategy for the study of Medieval Ceramics. It was also during this period that Sarah organised a number of important ceramics training



Sarah in Beirut, working on glass.

courses, in conjunction with the Geology Department at Southampton University, the Potteries Museum, Hanley, and John Hudson an independent potter working at Mirfield in West Yorkshire.

For ten years beginning in 1996 Sarah spent much of her holidays working on the publication of the large and important glass assemblage from the American University of Beirut Souks excavations – a huge undertaking. It was during this period that I saw for myself Sarah's ability to work under pressure and her skills as a glass illustrator. Never a morning passed in which her friend Professor Helga Seeden or I would come to breakfast without finding that Sarah was already hard at work. At the same time Sarah was instructing two AUB graduate students, in glass studies, Joanna Abdallah and Tania Zaven, whom she advised on their MA theses. Sarah subsequently went on to publish a number of important papers on the Beirut glass, culminating in 2005 with 'The vessel glass from the Souks sites BEY 006, 007 and 045' (Beirut, Lebanon; Beyrtus Supplementary Series).

In 2001 during a visit with the author to Tyre in Southern Lebanon, Sarah noticed that an exposed portion of a post-Roman glassmaking complex on what had been the Island Site was eroding and had not been recorded properly. Sarah with the cooperation of David Whitehouse, Fred Aldsworth and I, with funds from The Corning Museum of Glass, surveyed and investigated the remains. The results of this important exercise were published in two articles: 'The glass-making area on the Island site at Tyre, Southern Lebanon' in *BAAL Bulletin d'Archéologie et d'Architecture Libanaïses* vol. 5, 2001; and 'Medieval glassmaking at Tyre, Lebanon' in the *Journal of Glass Studies* vol. 44, 2002. These weeks were a joy for all who worked on the site, living in a beautiful near-empty beach hotel, and with help, especially at weekends from a number of archaeologists and friends from Beirut.

More recently Sarah had found time to work on the window and vessel glass recovered from excavations in Butrint, Albania, and was also working towards the publication of a book on the ancient glass collection housed in the museum of the (AUB) American University in Beirut. Always willing to serve, Sarah sat on the council of the Society of Antiquaries of London; was a co-opted member to the Society for Post Medieval Archaeology and off-prints Secretary 1982-1993; a member of the Institute for Archaeologists; Joint Chair, Yorkshire and Humberside Regional IFA Group 1990-2, and an IFA Finds Group Committee Member 1994-6.

Her unswerving support for the Medieval Pottery Research Group, and the aims of that society, to which from 1989 to 1994, Sarah held the post of secretary, was without doubt a major contributory factor to its present healthy status. Also a superb organiser, Sarah, over the years co-ordinated or was involved in the running of a number of major European glass and pottery conferences, and was heavily involved with the organisation of the first Medieval Europe conference at York in 1992; long before that, she also co-ordinated much of the post-excavation finds research and the liaison with external finds specialists involved in the publication of the various Norwich Survey volumes – even putting up all the specialists when they came to Norwich to study the material.

A large number of people in Edinburgh, but especially in the offices of Scottish Widows, are now wondering what to do with their wine corks. These were in great demand by Sarah for the production of pin boards, sold for one of her many charitable involvements. Sarah also had a huge social conscience, loved antiques fairs, her small garden, cats and making jewellery, for which her friends were forever on the hunt for beads. But possibly what gave Sarah most pleasure was good food, and she was an inspired cook; at one time, she had a thriving business sideline, catering for weddings, buffets, game fairs, etc., and making jam which she sold on Norwich Market. At conferences and especially while working in the Middle East, this often entailed trips with friends and colleagues to first-rate restaurants. Not one to talk much about her family, when her disabled mother was alive, Sarah regularly travelled long distances to be with her; and was very fond of her 'nephlets' as she called them.

Sarah was a good friend, generous and extremely intelligent; her passion for archaeology was inspirational, as was her belief in training. This is manifest by her bequest of money to the Medieval Pottery Research Group and the Association for the History of Glass to fund bursary schemes. Often very demanding of herself and those around her, Sarah could be extremely blunt and intolerant to anyone whom she thought was not pulling their weight. She was also difficult to argue with, but to those who gained her respect, Sarah was a staunch supporter, and I feel privileged to have worked with her, having been asked to assist with the glass from Beirut. Our time together, love of food, pottery and glass forged a great friendship, and I miss her, but have many wonderful memories.

George R Haggarty