

# Foreword

## Anna Brindle-Slowikowski, ceramicist: The person and the professional

Evelyn Baker

With hand on heart I can truthfully say that Anna was one of my very best appointments to BCAS (Bedfordshire County Archaeology Service, now Albion Archaeology); we had a vacancy for a full-time pottery specialist after Georgina Brine (Pinder) left archaeology to live in sunnier climes. When Anna joined us in March 1987 she took over the Bedfordshire Pottery Type Series that Jane Hassall (now Carr) and I had devised in 1979, based on a decade of 35 excavations in the town, including Bedford Castle (Baker *et al.* 1979). In 1975 I had initiated SEMPER with Mary Gryspeerdt; Anna took on this mantle also, making major contributions to its scope and development as regional officer and as Council member of the MPRG; she also served as Assistant Treasurer and Editor of Technical Papers (1988–99) and Chair of SEMPER from 1989–1992. Long-term permanency in one region helped her to build an unrivalled knowledge of its ceramics – of all periods – though her main interest and love was medieval. Her final published work, just before her death, was ‘*Genius in a Cracked Pot*’ for the MPRG (Slowikowski 2011).

Anna further developed the Type Series, mainly with ceramics from La Grava (Leighton Buzzard) and Stratton (Biggleswade); she expanded, contracted and amended it as required according to new work, including an unrecognised sherd of Tating-type ware from Bedford. Her constant monitoring and re-assessment had crucial repercussions for interpreting a major Anglo-Saxon and medieval royal manor, late alien priory of La Grava (Baker 2013). Although always keen to see excavations in progress she never saw this site because by 1987 it had been consumed by a 60 foot deep sand quarry.

In 1976 she took a degree in Ancient History and Prehistoric Archaeology from Sheffield University. With a background in the archaeology of Yorkshire and its pottery, Anna contributed specialist reports on the ceramics of Wharram Percy, a site she was associated with for a quarter of a century! With Stephen Moorhouse she published an important re-assessment of the pottery from the 1950–64 excavations at the Cistercian house Kirkstall Abbey.

She gained an MPhil at Leeds University in 1991 with her unpublished dissertation: *The archaeological evidence for the character and uses of Medieval Pottery in the Lowlands of West Yorkshire*. Her tutor was the late eminent archaeologist Lawrence Butler who always spoke highly of her work.

Sharing archaeology was a long held passion, which was why, in 1977, she studied for a PGCE in English at Sheffield Polytechnic, specialising in Middle Schools and children’s literature. This is illustrated in the photograph of Anna on the frontispiece. When funding would allow (and sometimes when it did not) she visited schools in the region with lots of hands-on material. This was hugely appreciated by children and teachers, for whom she created fun-illustrated booklets as popular teaching aids, drawing on unit work; she also coached teachers on how to use them and inspire their pupils.

Anna always drew her own pottery, leaving the ‘inking in’ to unit illustrators under strict supervision (see front cover). It was a pleasure to support her successful application to join the The Association of Archaeological Illustrators & Surveyors AAI&S, of which she later became Chair. Her most successful exhibition was an imaginative ‘Time Tunnel’ in the nave of the St Mary’s Church Archaeology Centre at Bedford, the base for BCAS/Albion Archaeology. Over 1800 people visited in a single day, time-travelling through the archaeology of the county from prehistory to modern times, illustrated with our own excavations, reconstructions and finds. It was a splendid experience for everyone. A major attraction was the accompanying free tastes of food appropriate to the period cooked by archaeologists – from vegetable and weed pottage, to garum to Damson Cheese to Jumbles and Tudor Taffaty tarts. Anna had a particular interest in clues that show how pottery was used in cooking, hence her key to sooting marks on La Grava pottery (see Baker 2013, 326, fig. 9.22).

And all this was in addition to her full-time pressured job. Always a caring manager – she played an important role in the unit management team. Later she had the special responsibility for personnel issues, so got to know the staff really well – the whole

of St Mary's Archaeology Centre was shocked and appalled by her early death. Anna never made a fuss about her breast cancer, but the Bedford hospital ward saw many visitors to her bed, and were greeted with smiles of welcome. Once released it was always work as usual, with time off for the ambulance trips to Cambridge for chemotherapy. No wigs for Anna, but an array of splendid headscarves and turbans. She was a Francophile, discovering holiday gites for herself, Philip and Harry, and enjoying French food and wine. It was during one of those happy interludes that the disease returned. The large number of professionals from near and wide who attended her funeral was a mark of the high regard in which she was held. She leaves a huge gap, which would have been wider and deeper had she not freely shared her experience and knowledge with others so that work on ceramics could continue.

In the 2007 Bedfordshire Archaeological Research Frameworks, Matthew Edgeworth argued '*Now that pottery identification techniques are more advanced (from Baker and Hassall 1979), there is real potential for going back to material excavated in Bedford from the 1960s to the present day.*' Anna most certainly agreed with this, and indeed, she was keeping the Type Series under constant review. She was still monitoring it when her cancer re-appeared, and it was due to her open-mindedness in re-evaluating pottery types that the spatial analysis of the La Grava site supported some fairly radical re-dating of some early buildings (Baker 2013). Fairly early on, before La Grava went for its final editing she intimated that there was likely to be a shake-up of Anglo-Saxon pottery dating for the region, and that the extensive excavations at Stratton (Shotliff in prep) was producing La Grava type 'A' wares from middle-Saxon contexts. She had seen, liked and encouraged early work on grid planning and building spatial analysis and said: '*I really think you are on to something there!*' Her maternity leave for the birth of her son Harry (who has just graduated from Oxford with a First) gave me space to pursue that analysis, some years before John Blair identified Anglo-Saxon 'short pole' grid planning with a different metrology (Blair 2013). The final report on La Grava used spatial analysis as a dating tool along with other evidence, including the necessary *caveat* of changing ceramic dates; underlying patterns of ditches and closes were shown to have been rigorously planned through several centuries, along with their buildings.

I took unfinished projects (La Grava and Warden Abbey) with me when I 'retired', and Anna liaised with English Heritage (now Historic England) over

the La Grava project, dealing effectively with a series of Inspectors, and taking the complex burden of its financial management. That she continued with this despite battling with breast cancer and chemotherapy is indicative of her innate qualities. Tragically she died before La Grava with her report on the site ceramics was published, what Michael Dawson called her 'seminal work', but her influence lives on. I am so grateful that she gave me the information and the impetus to re-assess all the early evidence with interesting results that I would have loved to discuss with her, the latest in this volume.

But pottery studies were only a part of her persona; besides the complete professional was the private Anna. There was home, with her long-term partner Philip Brindle whom she married just days before she died; and Harry, their beloved son, of whom she was intensely (and rightly) proud. There was cooking and entertaining (with wonderful Polish poppy-seed cake) and growing fresh vegetables from an allotment she shared with a fellow enthusiast. She spoke fluent Polish, and when she visited relatives she came back laden with amber, commissioned by staff and friends.

## Postscript

Anna's 'blue paper' for election as a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London was well advanced and receiving enthusiastic support but sadly she died before it could be balloted.

## References

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