

Obituary: Roger M. Jacobi
February 16, 1947 Ealing – December 9, 2009 Watford Hospital

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Roger M. Jacobi D. Phil., F.S.A., of the British Museum and the Natural History Museum, died in Watford in December 2009, aged 62, after a short battle with cancer. Roger was the Archaeologist and a key member of the Ancient Human Occupation of Britain (AHOB) project, which is concerned with exploring the presence and absence of hominins in Britain and the European continent over the last 1 million years (Fig. 1).

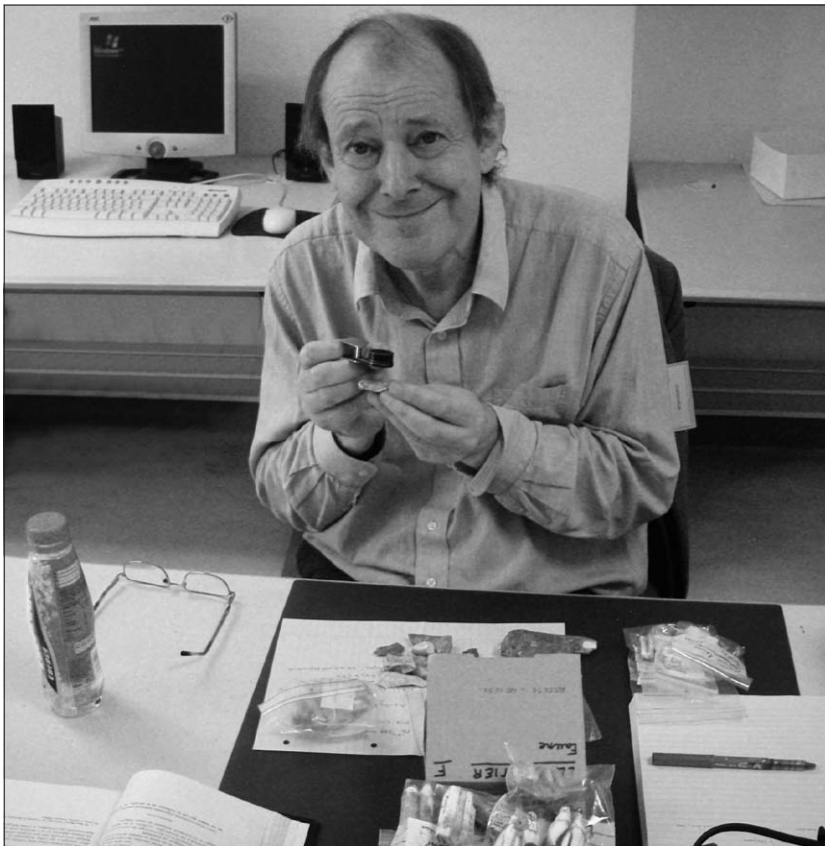


Fig. 1: Roger Jacobi in Les Eyzies identifying cutmarks on material from the site of Le Moustier for radiocarbon dating, in 2009.

Roger had an early interest in archaeology, whilst still at school he excavated a Roman site. He later studied Archaeology and Anthropology at Cambridge in 1966 and his D.Phil. was concerned with the Mesolithic of Britain (titled 'Aspects of the post-Glacial archaeology of England'). It remains a monumental and important piece of work that is unlikely to be matched in terms of its detail and broad sweep.

Roger worked at Lancaster and Nottingham universities in the 1980s, where he was an inspirational teacher of all things Palaeolithic. The university system, its teaching workload and bureaucracy, however, ultimately led him to leave and to pursue his first love, which was research. This was risky, because the curatorial positions he held at the British Museum were not permanent. In 2001, however, Roger became involved in the AHOB project with Chris Stringer, Andy Currant and Nick Ashton. This gave him a fulltime position and with it a wonderful opportunity to pursue research in a way ideally suited to his broad interests. Roger was interested in the early Middle Palaeolithic, the Upper Palaeolithic, and of course, the Late Glacial and Mesolithic. He also loved and was intimately acquainted with Roman archaeology. In fact it is hard to think of things that Roger was not interested in!

Roger was a steadfast colleague and collaborator with staff at the Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit (ORAU) and was committed to working towards more reliable chronologies, which he saw as crucial in the proper interpretation of cultural transformations during the Palaeolithic. The 'ultrafiltration' method of dating bone was widely applied by Roger and the ORAU team, initially within the British Isles, and more recently, on the continent. Several important publications have resulted and much work is ongoing. Roger was involved with the ORAU team in dating several key Palaeolithic sequences, such as Geißenklösterle, Fumane, La Ferrassie, Pataud, and many others. Travelling with Roger to visit sites and collections between 2005 and 2009 was a wonderful experience, and is much missed.

Roger's research can be characterised as careful, methodical and built upon an almost mathematical knowledge of museums and their collections. He reminded one of a Victorian gentleman, eschewing computers, email and the like, in favour of careful letters written in a distinct longhand exchanged within a wide circle of contacts and colleagues. He was a great friend of collectors and museum curators, and liked nothing more than travelling by train across the length and breadth of the British Isles, visiting museums. This wide knowledge of collections led him to a number of memorable rediscoveries. In the Bristol Museum, for instance, he found one of only two Aurignacian bone points in the country in stored collections (from Uphill, west Somerset). He was able on another occasion to find lithic refits from a single artefact in two different collections.

Roger was a valued colleague who freely shared his thoughts, insights and data. He was particularly fond of helping students at the beginning of their careers and making time to give them the benefit of his experience. He never talked down to anybody.

The diagnosis of Roger's cancer came in the first few months of 2009 at a time when he was at the peak of his intellectual and productive powers. He was able to produce several important publications in the last few months of his life, two of which, forthcoming in a book produced by the AHOB team, are concerned with the late Glacial and the Middle to Upper Palaeolithic respectively. They will form a lasting legacy to a man who

contributed so much to our knowledge of the human story in northern Europe during the Ice Age (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2: Roger Jacobi excavating at the site of Happisburgh, Norfolk, in 2008.

Roger left no immediate family; his father was German, and left Germany prior to the Second World War, his mother was English. Roger was born in Ealing, England: an only child. He had many close friends and colleagues however. Many mourned Roger's death at a function in London at the Society of Antiquaries on the 16th of February 2010, on what would have been his 63rd birthday. Much was said, and a glass or two of Merlot was raised to send off a remarkable scholar, a generous man, a good friend.

Selected bibliography

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