

Con Ainsworth 1917 – 2001



Biographical Notes

(taken from an account written by Con in December 2000.)

Con was born in Dorset. When he was 5 his family moved to Alderney. His father, a Geologist, became very interested in the island, its history and archaeology. Con remembered the excavation of Gallo-Roman burials in Longy Bay and of a Neolithic tomb at Tourgis Bay.

In his 20s the family moved to London where he started his working life – eventually in the radio and infant television industries, and where he was introduced to the world of Night Schools and Libraries.

When his parents moved to Lancing in the mid 30s, Con visited digs at Angmering and Wiggonholt. He also attended a talk on Lancing Ring by B.W.T.Handford and, possibly, Sheppard Frere, and from then he started taking a lively interest in Sussex Archaeology. (He sat, with Professor Frere, on the Fishbourne Archaeological Committee in the 1970s.)

In 1939 he was summoned to the Air Ministry and later the Army. He served 6 years with the Royal Artillery Heavy Anti-Aircraft units and eventually worked in Radar. He spent some time in Oswestry at a camp training ATS women to become radar operators. That's where he met Ena. He was very interested in the archaeology of all the various areas of his postings.

In 1946, de-mobbed, he and Ena moved to Worthing seafront to a late Victorian house, then to Goring in the early 1950s. Con was in business with radio and television until he retired in 1983.

He became involved with Sussex archaeology in 1946 when, as a member of the local Geologists Association, he visited Church Hill, Findon, where John Pull was excavating. Sites he was involved with were many and various, including Fishbourne, Cissbury, the Northbrook College site, Binsted, Goblestubbs, the Findon Well, the Arun logboats.

In the late 1960s he was asked to give a talk in Arundel to the Museum Society, and this led to him taking classes for Worthing WEA and other local venues. He also organised study tours to many areas of Europe, and local Archaeological walks. He served on the Council of S.A.S. and chaired the Archaeological Forum for some time, with Eric Holden. He was co-opted to the Worthing Library and Museum Committee, and represented the CBA and the SAS at a Public Enquiry over the scheme to drive the M27 through the Downs North of Worthing. He was very proud of his Honorary degree of MA, from Sussex.

During the late '80s and early '90s he made a series of programmes for Radio Sussex on local archaeology.

His enthusiasm inspired many folk to take up Archaeology seriously.

(WAS remembers him annually in our Con Ainsworth memorial lecture, in October.)

Con Ainsworth's work – some background and details

by Sioned Vos, WAS Archivist

Con Ainsworth had an interest in archaeology from an early age as can be seen in the extracts above from his 2000 autobiographical outline. It is intriguing that there is a possible first mention of him in the WAS Minutes of August 1953, where John Pull mentioned that "Mr Ainsworth had loaned a number of props and poles" to the excavation at Cissbury – nearly 10 years before he actually joined the Society, and, according to Con, 7 years after he'd first visited Pull's excavations at Church Hill! Roy Plummer conducted interviews with several members of WAS in order to record their memories of around this time. One of the most interesting was with Sue Lyon, Con's daughter, who said "they put me down a shaft because I was very little and they'd found a shaft going off at the bottom of their hole and because my mother wasn't there they decided I would be ideal and I was very excited to go down the shaft and I know that when I got back home they told me not to say anything but I was very excited about what I did and my mother went absolutely loopyand I just found there were loads of bones down there That's the dig where they found a little girl." So although John Pull doesn't mention him by name (Appendix 3 pp 260 ff In "Rough Quarries, Rocks and Hills", Miles Russell, Oxbow Books 2001) as well as loaning equipment, Con did spend time at Cissbury, as he says in his own somewhat censored account.

The Worthing Museum Correspondents Corps is not mentioned in the WAS Minutes until the 1963 Annual Meeting of the Society, though it was set up in 1961. There is an account of its beginnings in one of the History Files at Worthing Museum, written by the founder member Major A.C.Roper in July 1965. He traces it back informally to the increase in building development in the 1950s, especially the Ringmer Road estate, where various Roman features were discovered and investigated in 1956-60 by the then Assistant Curator, G.D.Lewis. The finds are in the Museum. Major Roper reports that some of the workmen were so enthused, they carried on reporting to the Museum from subsequent sites where they were working. He describes specifically "a gang of eight brothers, named Bashford" who dug pipe trenches, and were especially diligent. It would be fascinating if any members of that family could contribute any reminiscences of that time.



Every report from those involved in building or infrastructure works was investigated by either Mr Lewis or Major Roper – eventually with official backing from the Council. When Geoff Lewis left the Museum in late 1960, Major Roper "and [his] bicycle" were left to carry on until Ken [K.J.] Barton arrived as new Assistant Curator in January 1961. It was now obvious that the work was far too much for the two of them, so Barton organized the setting up of the Worthing Museum Correspondents. The Curator (Len Bickerton) wrote to a number of people, presumably via WAS among other organizations, inviting them to the inaugural meeting in May that year - though there's no list of recipients in the files. At the next (July) meeting, 14 members are listed. Con joined the Corps in November 1961 and became a very active member. Correspondents had short report forms on which they could record details of sites and fieldwalking finds, including negative reports. These came in from Pulborough and Horsham as well as the coastal plain and Downs around Worthing.

Con is recorded as having joined WAS in the Minutes of January 1963, but as the previous meeting was held in May 1962, it seems that he joined in the latter half of 1962, not long after he became a Museum Correspondent. He became a WAS committee member after less than a year's formal membership of the Society (recorded in the Minutes of January 1963, when he was in his mid-40s) which demonstrates how much his active involvement in local

archaeological work was appreciated. He became WAS's representative on the SAS Research Committee just over a year later.

Working under Ken Barton during the various excavations in Tarring Village in 1961-2 (**SAC 102** (1964), 9-27) gave him more archaeological experience. His site notebook from these projects is in the files at Worthing Museum, along with those of his fellow excavators.

Ken Barton left the Museum in late 1963 and his replacement, K. Jane Evans, continued leading the Correspondents' Corps. Many of them helped with her excavations at the Wiggonholt/Lickfold Roman pottery kilns when the A24 was being improved in 1964 (**SAC 112** (1974), 97-151). Con worked alongside her here along with other WAS members and Museum Correspondents. Major Roper mentions that "at one period fifty or more people, mostly youngsters" were working at this site – valuable experience of supervising a large workforce. The Major also highlights the Corps' recovery of the six log boats (some very fragmentary, though one is on display at the Museum) from the River Arun in the same year "under the leadership of Miss Evans and Mr. C. Ainsworth" – also paying tribute to John Friar, who supplied a heavy truck and trailer "without which the work would have been impossible".

Jane Evans left the Museum in 1969, and though there are no formal Minutes in the Museum files after 1968, there are still some report forms from members of the Correspondents' Corps coming in until the early 1970s.

Meanwhile, of course, Con had been digging at Binsted - a site he was alerted to by one of the Correspondents (Mr F.Blick, who had talked to Mrs Hare about the pottery being found in her garden when he had gone to the church to pursue a completely different piece of research). Excavation was mainly carried out in 1965 and 1966, but continued into 1967 when the WAS Minutes for May record the site being filled in. We are fortunate that a number of plans have survived, many of them drawn by Anthony Huxley, who donated some to the Museum in 2013, and others which were accessioned in 2016, having been rescued by WAS members after Con's death. The site notebooks are not really detailed, but a number of shorter notes, sketches and Con's notes on plans and sections will hopefully help the Cardiff University study which will be starting this summer on all the material from this site, which was only published as a short note in *Medieval Archaeology* (xi, 1967, 316-17), and with more detailed descriptions given by Con to K.J.Barton for his "Medieval Sussex Pottery" (Phillimore 1979). K.Jane Evans had helped Con sort out the pottery, which fills two whole bays in the Museum's stores and weighs at least a ton! There are two sheets of paper in her handwriting on which seem to be a basic guide to pottery forms and typology in the back of one of his notebooks.

Con's excavations mostly seem to have been carried out at weekends, or for short periods, so it is amazing how many sites he excavated and researched. A 1965 desk diary (Museum accession no. 2016/53/1/37) records him working at Binsted for just over a week at Easter and on Sundays and Wednesdays (possibly just the afternoons – half-day closing day for his shop) from July to October. At this time he was also looking at building work in Arundel, near the Post Office!

One of the easier sites we've recently had to deal with was a medieval possible moated site at Tortington, which was a non-rescue excavation he undertook in 1968, mentioned in SAS Research Committee Minutes and WAS Minutes. He had noticed medieval pottery and done some "bleeping" geophysics on the site beforehand. Six boxes of finds have now been discovered, again rescued from Con's garage, as well as some excellent plans and photographs by Major Roper, which came with the papers Roy Plummer worked on. This archive will eventually be passed to Littlehampton Museum.

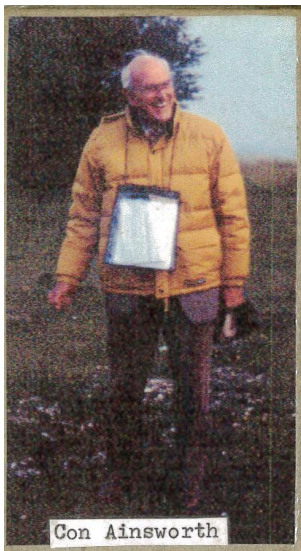
Con was very busy in 1971, with the rescue of a Roman cremation from the Marquis of Granby pub at Sompting (see **Britannia** V (1974), 310-316, which is mostly specialist reports on the pottery and glass: finds in Worthing Museum) and New Monk's Farm (salterns: Con's notes were published as part of E.W.Holden's article on the Arun Valley Salterns (**SAC 119** (1981), 117-148). Recently acquired finds from the latter are being processed by the Finds Team; Parham House ha-ha (unpublished – finds at Parham

House); nos. 5 and 8 Mains Farm Road, Upper Beeding (possible early medieval house – unpublished – no finds and only a few notes) and an excavation at the Pulborough Roman Temple for the Museum – requested by the Ministry of Public Building and Works, first dug in 1901 (again unpublished: some finds at Worthing Museum and some recently acquired plans, notes and photographs). It is a wonder he managed all this, as well as his teaching and running a business! We have also recently received a couple of bags of medieval pottery from Clapham digs in 1971 and 1972 (“Merrie Garden”) for which we have no notes or references at all.

Con was one of many amateur and professional archaeologists who had too much work to deal with. It is no coincidence that 1971 saw the first meeting of “Rescue”, which resulted in the setting up of the British Archaeological Trust, which helped obtain Government funding for research at threatened sites, at the University of London. This was organized by several leading archaeologists, prompted by the ever-increasing loss of recorded archaeology as a result of building developments. As a first-year undergraduate at the Institute of Archaeology I was, along with many fellow-students, persuaded to be a steward for this extremely well-attended meeting. I’m afraid I don’t remember much more than the vague impression of hearing Martin Biddle, Andrew Selkirk and Phil Barker speak: I was probably thinking of the evening’s rendezvous in the pub!

As you may have gathered from the long list in the Dec/Jan Newsletter, it can be difficult to work out exactly what site some finds are from. For example, the “Hammerpot” Mesolithic assemblage Bob Turner and the team have worked on does not appear to be either of the Hammerpot sites recorded in the HER (one medieval and one Mesolithic, but the material as described from the latter does not tally with that more recently examined: the finds from the two HER sites have not yet been traced). These flints were from a site recorded by Con and some of his students when work was being done on the A27 in 1974 (thanks to John Sayles for this information).

The fact that he was involved in so many “rescue” watching briefs and looking into occasional finds and enquiries as well as his teaching explain why there are so many sites recorded, but with so few detailed actual records of the work. There is material in Worthing Museum from most of them, but tying it in with any records is only now beginning to be possible, with the accessioning of more finds rescued from Con’s garage – a lot of which is being worked on by the Finds Team at Slindon – so that as complete an archive as possible will be put together. Frequently, however, we have either finds but no notes or plans, or vice versa. Then we have to rely on mentions in WAS or SAS Minutes, though not all sites seem to have deserved a mention there either! But progress is slowly being made.



CON AINSWORTH.

By Alex Vincent.

I first met Con in the summer of 1974 when I was 19 just after taking an interest in archaeology. My interest started after watching a programme on TV about an excavation somewhere in Britain. I bought my first archaeology book “The Amateur Archaeologist” and spoke to a colleague at work about my new interest and she told me about Con who she knew for some time. One evening after work, I went to Con’s house and told him that someone at work told me to see you about archaeology. He invited me in and we spoke about the subject for a couple of hours and he mentioned the various projects going on at the time. It was a most enjoyable evening.

From this, my interest in archaeology grew and grew and I got involved with excavations and visiting many sites. When Con gave lectures at meetings and on his archaeological walks, I always stood close by him not to miss a word he said because what he said was so interesting and

fascinating. Con took us to various places of ancient antiquity, particularly to see the excavations at

Boxgrove in the 1980s and 90s. We always ended up at a pub later for refreshment and a chat. He always liked the input which I put in for archaeology. I have a great respect for Con Ainsworth. May his name live on.

Con Ainsworth
by Roy Plummer

Sussex archaeology, and in particular, WAS, owe a great deal to Con. His contribution to archaeology was his charisma. He was always enthusiastic and inspired others to be just as enthusiastic. I know of a lot of people who were qualified archaeologists as a result of Con's influence.

He was not a tidy man. I remember many occasions when his glasses were held together with plasters, or even missing one arm. Buttons were often missing, or dangling from his jacket.

On one occasion he had talked about Roman coins to the Southwick class for two weeks. The class secretary spotted Con carrying coin boxes for a third week and smartly nipped ahead and wrote 'By special request NO MORE COINS' on the blackboard. Con stopped at the threshold, paused and then smiled and made up a talk not including coins.

Extract from Sally White's address at Con's funeral.

I met Con in 1974 in a field in Angmering. I was down a hole, and Con was visiting the site to see what we were up to. (A similar scenario was repeated several times over the years, always with a cheerful 'Hello Sal, what have you got there?')

When I was introduced to Con I was told that he was 'Mr Archaeology' in West Sussex. He has lived up to that reputation ever since. All of us who are here today are united in the high regard in which we held him. We all have our individual memories of Con. For myself, I always saw Con and Ena very much as a unit who shared a generosity, warmth and keen intelligence while each pursuing their separate interests. Personally, though I am saddened by his death, I am not altogether surprised that Con only lived for 9 months after Ena's death.

When I started work at Worthing Museum we had a dingy 'hut' at the back. On one of its walls were the words of a song written by Major Roper in 1964, to be sung to the tune of Widdecombe Fair. It told the discovery of a flotilla of logboats in the River Arun, a project in which Con was deeply involved. The last verse gives you the flavour of the song:

'Now they've collected a regular fleet,
All along, out along, Pulborough way.
Five canoes – six canoes – all records beat

By Jane Evans, Stuart Rose, John Friar, Tim Bertram,
Stan Jepson, Ted Sparkes, Mr Suggers, Major Roper,

Old Uncle Con Ainsworth and All,
Old Uncle Con Ainsworth and All.'

We all know that Con could be persuasive, but few, I think, would have expected even him to be able to persuade the owner of a property in Binsted, unhappily sited over an important Medieval kiln, to let him dig up her garden not once, but twice. I understand that her path was replaced in better condition than it had been when they arrived, but the sheer volume of pottery and tile that was removed, some 4 tons, must have left a sizeable hole in the garden. Con was not only a very gifted field archaeologist but also a loyal friend and a superb teacher and communicator. I used to wonder if his family had to make an appointment to see him between the courses that he taught on all periods across the length and breadth of Sussex. His energy was prodigious. He had that rare quality to help students to think out their own ideas while passing on to them the knowledge that they needed from him. In 25

years teaching adult education classes he inspired countless students and stimulated in them the excitement that mirrored his own attitude to archaeology and history. Not content with teaching all these classes, Con also contributed endlessly to the successful coach outings run by the Worthing Archaeological Society, led tours around local sites such as Boxgrove, and took groups abroad.

This year Con's unique contribution to both archaeology and education in Sussex has been recognised by the award of two honours. In January he was awarded the Honorary Degree of Master of Arts in recognition of the 25 years he spent lecturing about archaeology for the University of Sussex to adult groups all over Sussex. In May, when he was too ill to attend himself, Martin and Susie came to the AGM of the Sussex Archaeological Society when Con was elected an Honorary Vice-President of the Society.

Con's death marks the end of an era, that of the great amateur, largely self-taught archaeologists and educators who served Sussex so richly during the 20th Century. His work will have a tangible memorial in the work of his students and in the photographs of him in action that dot the archaeological files at the Museum.

Sally's tribute ended with these lines from Hamlet.

'He was a man, take him for all in all,
We shall not look upon his like again.'