

From Cambridge to Lake Chad: Life in archaeology 1956–1971

Graham Connah



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Cover photograph: East gate of Birnin Gazargamo city wall from outside, July 1963. Malilima Abba Kaka stands next to the Land Rover. The eroded remains of the city wall can be seen to the left and right. Photograph by Graham Connah.

Back cover photograph: The Benin excavation team, 13 March 1962. Standing left to right: Thompson Eguavoen, Shehu Zaria, Yakubu Bello, Vincent Irabor, Okon Warri, Sunday Okundia, Edwin Awerioghene, Gabriel Ogbemor. Crouching left to right: Linus Nankwo, Bawa Chori, A.E.Bassey, Umoru Gol. Absent: Branco Edebiri. Photograph by Graham Connah, at the back.

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Remembering
Umoru Gol and Julius Tilleh
who helped

one man in his time plays many parts
William Shakespeare
As You Like It Act II. Sc. 7

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Preface

This book is about how I became an archaeologist, and my life in archaeology between 1956 and 1971. It is intended to stand alone but can also be read in the context of my previous book: *Prelude: Growing up in the middle of the twentieth century*, privately published in 2011, that covered the first 22 years of my life from 1934 to 1956. That book included other material as well as tracing the origins and early development of my archaeological interests. In contrast, the present book chronicles my years of ‘finding the way’ into professional archaeology at a time when it was relatively more difficult to do this than in later years, ‘the way’ meaning both the career route taken and the archaeological methods adopted. Much of the book that follows is set in Nigeria during 1961 to 1971, including its Civil War of 1967 to 1970. It is not about archaeological research as such, which has been published extensively elsewhere, but about how that research was done, its circumstances, organization, and economic and social and cultural context. Consequently, it is also a personal history of Beryl, my wife, and myself, because the work and our lives interacted closely, each impacting on the other. These are aspects of archaeological investigations that have usually been treated as irrelevant in academic publications, but which need to be recorded if it is to be understood why things were done in the way that they were done. In the case of this book, the passage of time also gives these matters an historical significance. The archaeological world of half a century ago was very different from that of the present. Archaeologists were just beginning to become professionals, after their predecessors, few in number, had usually been amateurs, people of private means, or individuals dependent on the generosity of institutions or patrons. In the 1950s there was very little reliable employment in archaeology, by the end of the 1960s it was becoming increasingly common, although in Britain and some parts of Europe there was little interest in African archaeology until recent years, except for that of Egypt.

The archaeological world recorded in this book, also lacked the scientific sophistication now characteristic. Multiple advances in fieldwork, survey, excavation, dating, analysis, theory, the Internet, and publication have since enhanced the way that archaeology is conducted (although inadequate resources in some parts of the world, including Africa, limit their utilization). In contrast to the present situation, in the 1960s there were no desk computers, only mainframes in universities and other institutions, and manuscripts were literally that or had to be laboriously produced on mechanical typewriters. As an example of our problems, in Benin City in 1963 Beryl and I prepared diagrams of artefact distributions by calculating every percentage with a pencil and paper: we had no access to pocket calculators. Archaeology has come a long way since then, but it should be remembered that modern success stands on the shoulders of what was achieved so long ago.

It is my belief that, whenever possible, history should tell it like it was rather than presenting a politically correct view of how an author thinks it ought to have been. This book deals with real people as I perceived them, regardless of ethnicity, many of them now dead, but all of them deserving to be remembered. They provided the context of my beginnings and survival as an archaeologist during a period that was sometimes difficult.

Graham Connah
Canberra,
June 2018

1. Restarting: March–September 1956

At the end of March 1956 the Royal Navy, which had looked after me fairly well for two years, cast me adrift. I was retained in the Naval Special Reserve for three to five years in case they needed me again, but my two years of fulltime service was at an end. I travelled by rail in my Number 1 doeskin uniform, with its fancy gold badges, to my parents' home in West Moors, Dorset. They had retired there from Bromborough, in Cheshire, where I had been born and where I had grown up. They now lived in a neat bungalow built only the year before to their specifications (Figure 1.1) but I found it characterless and set in a drab straggling village that had a railway station, a few shops, a small agricultural factory, and not much else. Once I had taken my uniform off, I felt that I had lost my identity. I had nothing to do, my final pay from the Navy would not last long, I could not sponge on my retired parents and, worst of all, the companionship of the last two years was gone, and intolerable boredom threatened. I was due to go up to Cambridge at the beginning of October but that seemed a long way off and unreal. In addition, I missed Gay Clark badly, who by now was enjoying the Maltese sunshine (see Connah 2011). I even tried to arrange a passage to Malta on a Royal Naval Fleet Auxiliary ship that, because I was in the Naval Special Reserve, I could get free of charge. Luckily the plan fell through; nothing appropriate was sailing at the time, which disappointed me but was fortunate because heaven knows how I would have supported myself financially whilst there or how I would ever have got back. It was a crazy idea that had to be abandoned.

Sanity eventually prevailed. I obviously had to earn some money if I was to survive till October, when the academic year started at Cambridge. I could not be a burden to my parents. The most urgent thing was to recover my BSA Bantam 125cc motorcycle, which I had left behind in Northern Ireland because on a Naval draft, humping a large kitbag, a hammock and a small suitcase, it was impossible to take it as well. Several weeks before my journey to Devonport for demob, I had ridden it from Londonderry to Belfast and left it in the backyard of acquaintances of my parents. Collecting it now proved to be quite an expedition. Sometime in April I travelled by rail to Stranraer in southwestern Scotland, presumably via London, by boat to Larne and by rail on to Belfast. I must then have ridden the machine to Belfast railway station for the journey back to Larne, and in Stranraer I took it on the train with me for the trip south. Perhaps I lacked a spirit of adventure, but I thought that a 125cc motorcycle, with an engine about the same size as some motor mowers, was hardly suitable for a long ride through southern Scotland and all the way through England to Dorset in the south.



Figure 1.1. My parents' bungalow in West Moors, Dorset, 1959 or 1960.
Photograph by Graham Connah.

Back home I found a job as a labourer at a small factory in Fordingbridge, Hampshire. It manufactured what were called 'Lignacite' building blocks, most of which were said to be going to Southampton for building the inner leaves of cavity walls in new houses. The blocks were about 30x20x10cm and seemed to consist of about two-thirds sawdust and one-third cement. This made them relatively light in weight and three or four of us could put 1500 or so of them onto a truck by throwing each of them one to another: one or two of us on or near the stack, one on the side of the truck, one stacking them neatly on the truck. This was

hard on the hands, catching them particularly so, but no gloves were provided, instead each of us made palm-protectors from pieces of old truck-tyre inner tubes, with finger holes to keep them on. In fact, we loaders were the lucky ones, the blocks were pressed two or so at a time in several hand-operated presses that constantly exposed the operators to damp cement. This caused deep fissures in the hands of these unfortunate individuals, who again were neither provided with gloves by the employer nor had the initiative or money to provide gloves themselves. The worst job, however, was that of a middle-aged man who slit open the paper sacks of cement and emptied them into a hopper that lifted the cement up to a mixer to be combined with the sawdust. His face, hands, and other exposed parts of his body were grey with cement dust that had become absorbed into his skin, and his lungs must have been affected as well. How long he had done this job was unclear, but he was ex-Royal Navy, where he had served as a Stoker-Mechanic and therefore had been used to working in difficult situations. He appeared quite resigned to his work and even cheerful. The rest of us experienced similar conditions, when all of us turned to once every week or so to unload a whole truck of cement in 1-hundredweight paper sacks. One backed up to the truck and a sack was put onto one's shoulder to be carried into the factory. As sack after sack was carried in this way, cement dust got into one's ears, hair, nose and everywhere else. Our champion was a man who could carry two sacks at a time, merely clasping one to each side of his chest. For the rest of us, one at a time was quite enough.

Overall, the conditions in this small rural factory were poor but typical of non-unionized employment in Britain at the time. Nevertheless, my impression was that the employer was fairly good by contemporary standards, if somewhat unimaginative concerning the wellbeing of his workforce, which numbered about seven or eight men in the factory and yard and another one or two people, possibly including a woman, in the works office. Certainly, we had a small room for our lunch breaks, when we ate our own sandwiches, and tea breaks. In conversations during these times I learnt something of the workers' attitude to life. Their pay seemed to be modest, although probably a little better than mine as a supernumerary worker. A few packets of cigarettes, a few beers, and the rest of their weekly wage went to their wives to provide their families with food, accommodation and other necessities. Civilian life, it seemed to me, lacked the socio-economic protective net of the armed services. One was on one's own.

I think that I stuck the job for five or six weeks, probably till early in June. I did my best to 'pull my weight' along with the other workers but I lacked their physiques and long experience of manual work and, as time went on, they sometimes gave me easier work guiding a motorized trolley that transported the 'green' blocks from the factory to the stacks in the yard. Nevertheless, occasionally I found the demands of the work too much when we had to handle real concrete blocks, which weighed much more than the usual ones that consisted of sawdust and cement. Early each morning I rode my motorcycle the moderate distance from West Moors to Fordingbridge and back again in the late afternoon, only once coming off it when I skidded on fresh cow manure in one of the villages I passed through. I gradually became convinced that I could use my time a little better, particularly as Cambridge was looming in a few months' time. Before joining the Navy, I had worked for some weeks in the Liverpool Museum as a volunteer and had spent parts of my leaves there also. They had even offered to find me temporary employment for the period between demob and Cambridge but when the time came they had no money and had added to my other disappointments in that spring of 1956.

However, I now decided that I must make a bigger effort. Having saved a little money from my labouring job and left my father to sell my beloved motorcycle in order to add to my funds, I went up to Liverpool by rail (my father was still able to get me a limited number of free rail trips) and offered to do further voluntary work at the museum. My father's connections with TocH, a legacy of his World War I experience, got me accommodation in Gladstone House, a men's hostel run by that organization in Rodney Street, in the centre of Liverpool and famous for the number of doctors located there. Gladstone House was so-named because William Ewart Gladstone, several times Prime Minister of Britain, was born there. It housed an interesting collection of mainly younger, single men, who had a variety of skilled, clerical and semi-professional jobs. It also had a young Anglican clergyman as its chaplain, and a man called Harry

who was a long-term resident, had been blind from birth, and worked as a scale adjuster for Avery, a firm that manufactured weighing equipment. He had a workshop in the basement of Gladstone House, where he busied himself with his hobbies when not at work, and where the rest of us had to switch on the light if we went down there. On one occasion, a group of us returning from a local pub at night found Rodney Street unusually dark because its lights had failed. Incredibly, Harry offered to guide us because he knew the way! Less surprising, it was he who fixed the electrical fuses whenever the antiquated wiring system of the House failed.

Gladstone House was built in 1792–1793 in the Georgian style, with generous-sized rooms that housed perhaps a dozen or so of us. I shared a bedroom with, I think, three others. All the residents ate together for breakfast and dinner at night; at lunchtime we were away at work, except for Sundays when, from memory, we had Sunday lunch. I cannot remember but I think that there must have been a cook/housekeeper employed there but we also probably helped with jobs about the house. There was an easy camaraderie that I appreciated, having only recently lost that of the Navy. Most individuals I cannot remember by name, but some personalities stick in my memory, such as a man who worked in a clerical or sales capacity for ‘The Manchester Slate Company’, a roofing firm. There was another who was clearly well-read in English literature and might have been a graduate with a teaching job. A third was a product of Stonyhurst, a Catholic Public School in Lancashire; he seemed better off than the rest of us but nevertheless rode an ancient motorcycle. It was he, one Sunday morning, as some of us relaxed in the lounge of the house, who introduced me to that beautiful Beethoven piano piece *Für Elise*. The lounge contained a piano and some worn sheet music amongst which there was this masterpiece, till then unknown to me. Our pianist struggled and failed to get through the difficult chords some way into his performance, in spite of several attempts, but the beginning was enough to captivate me. On another occasion a group of us spent part of a Sunday trying to improve the back garden of the house. There was no front garden but at the back there was a moderately long walled strip of urban dereliction. For so it was; when we attempted to do something with it we found that the soil was so contaminated with soot from over a century of massed coal fires and their smoking chimneys that nothing would grow in it. Nevertheless, my time at Gladstone House, probably from early June till mid-August 1956, was enjoyable, and I revisited it briefly around Christmas 1956 and perhaps on later occasions. One of my stranger memories was of its most senior resident, a man approaching retirement, who in a mealtime discussion suddenly remarked that he had never sat on a toilet seat since 1917. In spite of our insistence, he would not tell us why, so it remained one of life’s little mysteries!

The immediate problem in early June 1956 was that my rent for accommodation, modest though it was, and my other expenses, would have to be met and my available funds would not last long. Now it was that my friends at the museum came to my aid. Doug Hyslop, the photographer, knew a man whose name, I think, was Don Bailey. He ran a tropical-fish shop in a backstreet of central Liverpool. He needed some part-time assistance. Here it needs to be explained that, commencing in the early 1950s, for a while there developed a widespread craze for keeping fish, particularly tropical fish, in glass tanks, often quite large tanks. Doctors’ and dentists’ waiting rooms had them, ladies’ hairdressers had them, restaurants had them, some shops had them, even private homes had them. The fish were thought to be ‘restful’ and to help people relax, what the fish thought of it is not known. Inevitably it could be an expensive matter. Although fish such as goldfish, shubunkins, and guppies were relatively simple to keep and modestly priced, angel fish and some of the other gaudier tropical fish were quite costly both to purchase and to care for. To really show them off one needed to buy a fairly large tank, but an electrical water heater to keep the water at the correct temperature and an electrical pump to aerate the water were also needed. In addition, one needed gravel and rocks to go into the bottom of the tank, suitable water plants, even miniature castles and other follies for the fish to swim around. Furthermore, the fish needed to be given the correct food, one needed to keep an eye on their health, and the tank had to be cleaned out regularly. Mr Bailey had latched onto the demand thus created and could provide everything that anyone needed. I got the impression that he had started from very small beginnings and even when I worked for him he was trading on quite a small scale from rather run-down premises. He was, however, a man with ability

and imagination and he worked hard. He also sold budgerigars but fish and everything associated with them were his main business.

He was a likeable man who had a good rapport with his numerous customers, believing it seemed in the old adage that 'the customer is always right'. If one of them returned after a few days to complain that a purchased fish or bird had died, Don Bailey never argued but replaced it immediately without charge. This in spite of his private opinion that it was most likely the purchaser's fault that had led to the death. He was also resourceful; many species of fish required particular live food and he also had this for sale, in small ice-cream cartons with lids. It consisted of small *Tubifex* worms, sent every few days from London by train, in recycled biscuit tins of the shallow variety, that were picked up from Lime Street Station in Liverpool by Don's retired father, in a van that he drove. These were apportioned by hand to the small cartons for sale. According to Don, they bred in the London sewers and, as we had our mid-morning coffee and biscuits he would remark: 'always remember, one hand for the *Tubifex* and the other for your biscuit'.

I worked in the tropical-fish shop every weekday morning and all-day Saturday, so that I could work unpaid at the Liverpool Museum every weekday afternoon. This arrangement earned me enough money to just get by, although at the end of my stay in Liverpool the museum did give me a small honorarium that helped. Work at the shop could be demanding. At a time before bar-codes and digital cash-registers, one had to remember all the sale prices and one needed good mental arithmetic to give the correct change. At neither of these was I much good, unlike another man younger than I who also worked in the shop, seemingly with little education but mentally very sharp. It was a fitting reminder that education was not the only thing that mattered. In addition, one spent hours on one's feet, Saturdays being especially tiring because the shop was nearly always full of customers on this the busiest day of the week. I was left with a life-long respect for shop assistants, who do a job the difficulties of which customers often fail to appreciate. More enjoyable were various forays with Don's father, an ex-merchant-navy man, in his van. We picked up the consignments of *Tubifex* worms from Lime Street Station and also visited various shops and businesses to 'service' their fish tanks. This usually involved siphoning out all the water, thoroughly cleaning the inside of the tank, replacing gravel, plants and so on, all the while keeping the fish alive in another container. It could be quite a task, enlivened by the risk of getting a mouthful of dirty water when sucking air from the rubber pipe used for siphoning. There was also a memorable occasion when a large tank sprang a serious leak while we were cleaning it and we flooded part of the floor of an upmarket ladies' hairdresser establishment. I recollect that its staff members were remarkably stoical about the disaster. However, overall, I enjoyed Don Bailey's shop, which was made special by the presence of a large green parrot that was not for sale, the import of parrots being banned at that time because of psittacosis, a disease communicable to humans. It was an interesting place to work, I was grateful to him for the job, and I was pleased several years later when I revisited him and found that the shop had blossomed into larger premises and was clearly doing well.

My real purpose in Liverpool, nevertheless, was neither Gladstone House nor Don Bailey's tropical-fish shop. They were merely the means by which I was able to work at the museum. By the summer of 1956 a small part of the Liverpool Museum had been reopened to the public but much of it still waited for rebuilding after destruction in the World War II blitz, and the professional staff and some of the support staff were still based at Carnatic Hall and Sudley House. During the time that I had worked at Carnatic back in 1953, and during leaves from the Navy since then, I had done some conservation work on several antique guns. It now emerged that prior to the war and the blitz there had been a large collection of guns and other weapons, but they seemed to have vanished without trace. Perhaps they had been victims of the blitz, unlike some of the museum's collections that had been moved to safety at various locations in Cheshire and North Wales before the bombing. However, nobody seemed to know and apparently there were no surviving accession records for a collection of weapons, so that it was not even known what the collection had contained. Encouraged by the museum staff, I determined to solve the mystery. The uniformed attendants at the museum seemed to be the best informed of the staff, so far as the museum's

history was concerned, and I think that it was with one of them that I embarked on my search. I found that in a back street behind the museum, in the centre of Liverpool, there was a large run-down warehouse in which parts of the museum's surviving collections had been languishing for years. We gained entry to this building and found its interior to be crammed with an unbelievable variety of artefacts, big and small, most of which were liberally coated with soot that had drifted through ventilators and other openings over the years. I cannot remember the details, but the contents of the warehouse were intimidatingly numerous and confused, some boxed, others not. My companion and I quickly came to the conclusion that our search was hopeless; of only one thing could we be certain, there were no weapons to be seen anywhere. We were about to abandon our search when we noticed that one corner of the large oblong space within the warehouse was partitioned off. An investigation revealed that it was a long-abandoned toilet, covered with soot like everything else. Out of bloody-mindedness rather than anything else, we forced open the door, although with some difficulty. The consequence was rather like Howard Carter's first look into Tutankhamun's tomb, although considerable less romantic; we found that the small room was packed with weapons of every description, stacked on top of one another in a filthy, rusted jumble.

The museum authorities clearly regarded our find as an achievement and I was provided with transport and assistance to remove all the items to Carnatic Hall, where a room at the top of the building's tower was provided for me to sort, clean, and conserve the weapons. This I set about doing but at the same time I had to write a basic catalogue because none could be found, and never was found so far as I am aware. This was a difficult task because at that time there were few available publications to assist me in my identifications, unlike later years when interest in historical weapons greatly increased. I just had to rely on the little knowledge that I had, along with a detailed examination of each object. There were weapons of every description: muskets from the sixteenth century onwards, early rifles with a variety of breach mechanisms, Westley Richards sporting guns, early Winchesters, a massive-bore elephant gun, one or two World War I machine guns, pistols, revolvers, automatics, many swords, spears, a variety of other edged weapons, and so on. The artefacts also came from many ethnographic backgrounds although most were from Britain: Turkish, Arab, African, Chinese, South-East Asian, seemingly from wherever British colonial interests had penetrated. Condition also varied, some objects having survived neglect fairly well, others having suffered grievously. Cleaning and oiling and occasional disassembly achieved a lot and the weeks went by as I worked through the collection and built up my catalogue (Figure 1.2). The museum authorities seemed to appreciate my efforts. Nora McMillan, who after her husband's death in 1954 was again employed at the museum, later told me that a retired British Army sergeant-armourer, who had volunteered to look after the collection after I left, said that I had done a good job, even with what I regarded as my amateurish catalogue.

I enjoyed my weeks in Liverpool: Gladstone House was a sociable place, Don Bailey's tropical-fish shop was interesting, and I felt that my work at the museum was giving me experience that could be useful when seeking employment in the future. However, museum conservation activities were not really archaeology as I then understood it and there seemed to be little involvement in *accessible* archaeology by members of the museum staff. The Director, Harry Iliffe, whose health was failing, was concerned with South-



Figure 1.2. At work on the weapons collection, Liverpool Museum, Summer 1956. I appear to be holding a sixteenth-seventeenth-century musket. Photograph by Keith Priestman.

West Asian and Cypriot archaeology, and the Keeper of Archaeology, Elaine Tankard, seemed to have a background in Classical or Egyptian archaeology, but neither showed any interest in encouraging me. Furthermore, morale at the museum was low because of the delay in rebuilding and the lack of adequate money for the task. Therefore, as the summer wore on I sought some excavation experience that would take me back into what I regarded as the mainstream of things. I was principally attracted by prehistoric archaeology and I had been impressed by my brief visit to Wiltshire in December 1953 with my father. My reading had also persuaded me that the most significant developments in British archaeology had taken place on the chalk of Wiltshire, Dorset and related areas. Consequently, I sought an appropriate excavation to which I might volunteer as a helper, and found one being conducted by Paul Ashbee at a group of round barrows on New Barn Down, just to the east of Amesbury in Wiltshire. I had heard of Ashbee previously, although I have no idea how, and I had the impression that he knew what he was doing. I was not to be disappointed.

So, the last two weeks of August and the beginning of September found me in Amesbury, a lodger in a big house occupied by an elderly lady who I imagine must have been a widow. I think that my father had found me the accommodation: he was always good at such things. This included dinner in the evening, so far as my memory goes, and a good cooked breakfast. Toast and marmalade was provided with the latter and a curious unspoken interaction developed between me and my hostess concerning the number of pieces of toast. The first morning featured one round of toast that I duly consumed, to be pleasantly surprised by two rounds of toast the second morning, to which I also did justice. On the third morning there were three rounds and I suspect that it got to four rounds before the lady of the house and I settled for an unspoken armistice. Her generosity was just as well, however, because my lunches consisted of only bread and margarine, with the addition of jam spread with a small steel ruler from my pocket because I did not possess a suitable knife. It was all that I could afford but my work at the site involved spade and shovel as well as trowel and brush; bread and jam were hardly adequate fuel.

Paul Ashbee proved to be an able archaeologist. Trained by Gordon Childe at the Institute of Archaeology of London University just after World War II, in which he had served in the British Army, his excavations were research-oriented and disciplined, he understood stratification and he regularly published his work. Nevertheless, he was employed as a history teacher at a school in East London, demonstrating yet again that there were virtually no jobs in archaeology. His excavations were done during school summer

holidays. It was, I think, sometime in the late 1960s before he got an archaeological post: a lectureship at the University of East Anglia, where he stayed until retirement. I found him easy to work with. A few days of routine trowelling by me seemed to convince him that I had skills of which he could make use. I was therefore allocated a partly excavated barrow (Barrow 58, see Ashbee 1985: 43–46), where work had temporarily ceased probably due to a shortage of helpers. The overall excavation of the barrow group was apparently in about its fourth out of a total of six weeks and, given the uncertainty of the weather in most British summers, it was clearly necessary to complete the excavation of all the



Figure 1.3. Graham Connah excavating one of the cross-sections of Amesbury Barrow 58, Summer 1956. With (left to right) Rosalind Baker and Gene Webb. Photographer unknown.

barrows as soon as possible. The project was a 'rescue' excavation of damaged barrows, funded by the Ancient Monuments Division of the Ministry of Works, which meant that paid labour was present as well as volunteers. The damage resulted from arable agriculture and Ashbee's task was to get as much information out of the sites as possible in the available time. His research plan concentrated on the primary and any secondary burials in the mounds and on the structure of each mound and its surrounding ditch, that is to say on the stratified evidence of how it had been built. He was also interested in the old ground surface beneath each barrow and in the primary silt of its ditch. These could yield charcoal for radiocarbon dating and evidence of the prehistoric environment. Therefore, his strategy was to section each mound with quadrantal trenches, rather than excavating them completely.



Figure 1.4. Planning Amesbury Barrow 58, with Ann Forsyth, Summer 1956. Photographer unknown.

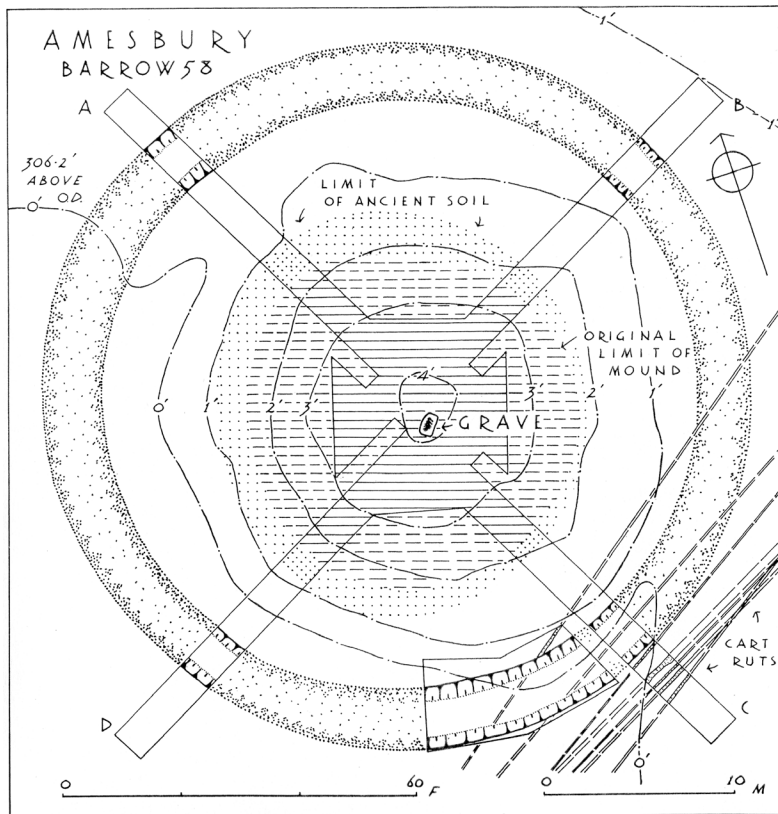


Figure 1.5. Plan of Amesbury Barrow 58. Summer 1956. (Ashbee 1985: 44).

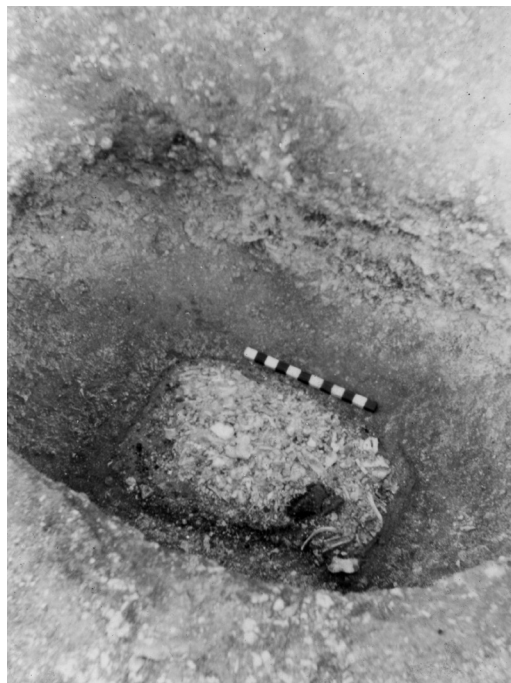


Figure 1.6. The cremation in Amesbury Barrow 58. The dark object at lower right is the dagger and its wrapping. Scale in inches. Photograph by Graham Connah.

I set about completing the excavation of the barrow that I was given, aided by two young female volunteers, who worked efficiently and cheerfully on what was mainly a fork, shovel and wheelbarrow task (Figure 3). We completed the sections of the mound and sectioned its ditch in several places (Figures 4 and 5). Subsequently a radiocarbon date (2 sigma range, calibrated) was obtained of 1860–1495BC (HAR-6226) for the loam core of the mound (Ashbee 1985: 83; 1986: 84). We also exposed the top of the filling of a small central pit in the natural chalk, which was subsequently found to contain the primary burial. This became the high point of the excavation of the mound when another female helper, probably Ann Forsyth, and I investigated it. We removed its filling by trowel and brush, mainly the latter, to expose a cremation lying in a shallow pit. On top of the cremation was a small copper dagger, that had been wrapped in cloth and moss, remnants of which survived, before being placed in the grave (Figure 6). In addition, it was later found that traces of the dagger's sheath were also present. Below the dagger was half a nodule of iron pyrites. We excavated the filling of the pit so gently that we exposed vertical grooves in its chalk-rock sides, left by the wooden stake that had been used to

dig it several millennia ago. It was as if the 4000 years or so since the burial had vanished, transporting us back in time.

During the same summer another group of round barrows were also being excavated on Earl's Farm Down, near to New Barn Down and separated from it by the modern road leading east from Amesbury. I cannot remember who was directing this work, but the Assistant Director was (I think) Bernard Wailes. According to a story that came to me second hand from Ashbee, Wailes was left in charge of the work on one occasion while the Director was absent from the site (I tried to never leave a site that I was excavating). During this time an untidy-looking man walked onto the site and immediately remarked to Wailes: 'Fagg says they're gongs'. This was Gordon Childe, one of the leading prehistoric archaeologists at that time. It was the first time that I had heard of Bernard Fagg, who was to be important during part of my later career. He had recently published a paper about rock gongs in Nigeria and had found 'many ringing rocks' in the Prescelly Mountains, of South Wales, the source of the Blue Stones at Stonehenge, hinting that their presence at Stonehenge might have been because of this characteristic (Fagg 1956: 41). Apparently Childe had somehow read the paper (actually dated December 1956 and published in Nigeria) and that very day had gone to Stonehenge and banged the stones, without producing any satisfactory sounds. It is an indication of the informality of British archaeology at that time that he was able to do this presumably without permission. Unlike Bernard Wailes, I never met Childe; he was at London University, I went to Cambridge, and the following year of 1957 he committed suicide.

I can remember little else about the New Barn Down excavation, except that O.G.S. Crawford, the founding editor of *Antiquity*, paid us a visit one day and sat on the ground to eat his sandwich lunch with the rest of us. There was also a massive thunderstorm one afternoon, in which lightning killed a woman at an Army camp on nearby Salisbury Plain. It was said that she was carrying a tray-full of coins from one hut

to another and that it was this that attracted the lightning. In addition, Ashbee's wife gave birth to a son during the excavation, she in Kent and he not leaving the excavation. Finally, Ashbee asked me to remain behind after the excavation ended in early September, when alone I bundled up all the excavation tools and labelled them for return to the Ministry of Works at Lambeth Bridge House in London. Somehow the address was taken too literally, and they were delivered to the front entrance of the building, to the aggravation of some of its civil servants and Ashbee's subsequent embarrassment. I think that Ashbee thought that it was my fault, although it is difficult to see how it could have been. However, he was too good-natured to really blame me, and the affair was merely added to the fund of stories that he liked to tell.

Some of the rest of September I spent in Devizes, helping in its museum, having got to know the curator, Nic Thomas, who had visited the New Barn Down excavation. As the month wore on, the prospect of Cambridge loomed ever closer and, after an almost three-year break from academic work, I wondered if I would be able to get back to it. Sitting in Nic Thomas's van, out on an archaeological mission of some sort, I remarked to him that I doubted if I would last the first term. I have no memory of his reply, but my pessimism was genuine. So, by early October I was back at my parents' bungalow in West Moors, preparing to leave for Cambridge. A virtually obligatory charcoal-grey lounge suit was purchased, in accordance with instructions from my college, Selwyn. An account was opened with the Midland Bank, that was also my father's bank, clothes and relevant books were packed, and I prepared to face yet another major change in my life during a year in which I had already played so many roles.