

## Obituary

# John Hayes 21 May 1938–27 Feb 2024

John Riley 

### Introduction

John Hayes, who died last February aged 85, has left an indelible mark on Mediterranean and North African archaeology.

With his thick mop of unruly hair, ready laugh and characteristic stance – arched back, head upright, with his knuckles on his hips – John Hayes was a much-respected, ubiquitous and welcome figure on excavations throughout the Mediterranean region and beyond, whether publishing their pottery, advising specialists or contributing at conferences, and always encouraging young researchers.

His lasting achievement was to rein in and bring to order the bewildering and assorted jumble of Roman red-slipped fine wares found on all sites throughout the Mediterranean region and beyond. He created a fundamental new reference tool for classifying and dating these wares to enable wider chronological contexts to underpin research into ancient communication and trade patterns.

His seminal work *Late Roman Pottery*, published by the British School at Rome in 1972, provided for the first time for the period of the 1st–7th centuries AD a comprehensive, chronologically arranged type series classification of these wares from both East and West. His basic typology, which brought to the fore the importance and ubiquity of Tunisian manufactured African Red Slip Ware, has remained robust despite major advances in the field in the ensuing 50 years or so.

He went on to publish, in 1985, a major typology of late Hellenistic and Roman sigillata from the Eastern Mediterranean ('Sigillata Orientale', as part of the *Enciclopedia dell'arte antica*, Rome).

He spent the rest of his life developing and expanding on this fundamental research, both geographically and chronologically.

His open, helpful and sharing nature and personal availability saw him continually and spontaneously reporting news, and providing updates on unpublished findings and parallels from his extensive ongoing travels throughout the Mediterranean. In this way, he was able to 'pollinate' burgeoning archaeological projects, accelerating a uniform, confident identification in the field and appreciation of the role of ancient pottery for excavators and academics alike.

### Libya

The Society for Libyan Studies (now BILNAS) excavations at Berenice-Benghazi benefited very early on from a typical John Hayes personal visit, instigated by the Society's highly supportive founder, Professor Donald Strong in autumn 1971.

John was no stranger to Eastern Libya – he had published with remarkable rapidity the Archaic Greek and Roman pottery from Professor John Boardman's 1963–1965 excavations at Tocra.

When he flew into Benghazi from Athens a rescue excavation was underway at Roman Berenice with a handful of young

archaeologists (including me) fending off a bulldozer and many lorries erasing the site.

John Hayes was a godsend – he quickly identified a wide range of fine pottery wares from both the West and East Mediterranean. He then collected together a working type series template for us, advised us how to recognise and date them in the field, established provisional chronologies for the site and left us with copies of proofs of his forthcoming book *Late Roman Pottery*.

John's arrival, his generosity and sharing gave the excavation the orientation and date fixes it so urgently needed, and he continued to be supportive and helpful to us over the next few years.

We were among the first to experience the levels of relief, knowledge and confidence brought by John in such a fashion and, over the following 45 years or so, to very many other excavators and specialists across all regions of the Mediterranean.

### Early years

Born in Kingston-on-Thames in 1938, John developed his interest in archaeology at the grammar school there, digging with Professor Sheppard Frere at Verulamium (St Albans). He read Classics at Queens College, Cambridge, graduating in 1960, after which he based himself in Athens to research his PhD *Late Roman Fine Pottery in the Mediterranean with Special Reference to Finds in Greece*, supervised by Professor Jocelyn Toynbee and awarded in 1964.

Professor Henry Robinson had encouraged John at the American School at Athens to use the extensive stratified and dated levels from the Athenian Agora excavations as the basis for his research which culminated in his keynote publication *Late Roman Pottery*.

Following his PhD, he held a Fellowship at Newcastle University (1964–66) and lectured briefly at Yale University from 1967–68. In 1968 he gained the security and resources to travel extensively in the Mediterranean when appointed to the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, where he stayed for over 20 years, ending up as Curator of the Greek and Roman Department.

### Carthage

John's experience and expertise quickly proved valuable for the mid-1970s UNESCO Programme to save Carthage where several international teams worked on different projects within Carthage.

On that Programme, John was invited to the University of Michigan team by its director, Professor John Humphrey, who had also worked at Berenice-Benghazi. John was very active visiting all the teams, sharing information and giving the benefit of his knowledge to all equally, while helping to establish uniformity of identification of the Roman wares.

It was a privilege for me to work closely with John there as we grappled with huge amounts of pottery with very limited time.

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### Aptitude for pottery

John was blessed not only with a brilliant mind but also an extraordinary memory for pottery shapes, textures, fabrics and colours – once seen, never forgotten.

There was persistent talk that John was so engrossed with ancient pottery that he ate pots! The grain of truth here is that he might occasionally lick the fabric to distinguish the textures of fine, otherwise indistinguishable, Roman wares.

John was a skilled pottery draughtsman and documented his pots with accurate and informative drawings. He left meticulous notes and observations for future generations, embedded in the bags and boxes in dusty pottery stores throughout the Mediterranean.

Fi Everett, who also worked with John at Carthage says: ‘John was an incredibly generous academic. He did not feel threatened by upcoming bright young students or with established academics taking his ideas. He was into spreading knowledge for the development of understanding. His work was groundbreaking for its time – he looked outside the box and was open to new ideas.’

Among the new ideas he fully supported and took part in was pottery counting and weighing (somewhat controversial at the time!), and even enthusiastically experimented with a diamond saw to cut profiles of pots to save drawing time, given the huge amount of pottery typically excavated (even more controversial!).

He did very much appreciate his co-workers at all levels. For example, we would be working in the pot-shed at Carthage when John would suddenly leap up, rush down the street and then appear beaming a few minutes later with a large bag of cherries to be shared out among the pot-washers and team.

### Constant traveller

During his whole career – and even more so especially after 1991 when he left the Royal Ontario Museum following his mother’s death to spend more time with his elderly father – John travelled very widely, visiting many sites as a freelance pottery specialist. He participated in many projects in countries as disparate as Albania, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Italy, Lebanon, Libya, Tunisia and Turkey.

A polyglot, he networked widely in several languages and was politically acute, well-informed and aware, but rarely engaged in politics apart from the occasional perspicacious comment.



**Figure 1.** John Hayes at Carthage in July 1978 – Prof Andrea Carandini is on his right (Photo: John Riley).

He had a thirst for new knowledge and as soon as he discovered something he would also want to tell everyone he thought would benefit from hearing it.

Fi Everett again comments: ‘When he returned to the UK from a period abroad, he would get in touch to share his most recent “adventures”. I remember the enthusiasm with which he recounted his escape under fire from the dig-house at Paphos (during the Turkish invasion in 1974) – he was going out by one door as the guns were coming in the other – well probably a bit exaggerated, but he made it exciting and he loved recounting that adventure and having been part of that excitement – once he was safe.’

Although he didn’t suffer fools gladly and could be somewhat impatient and abrupt with time-wasters, he was an excellent mentor to all who sought his help and he always had time for young, aspiring researchers. If he didn’t know the answer to a query he would say outright that he didn’t know – the mark of a truly confident expert – and would solicit their opinion.

John was especially highly respected, fêted and appreciated by young and old alike when abroad. However, at home he was a bit too far ahead of his time and didn’t easily fit into any system.

There is a tale from his early career of fellow diggers in the Nene Valley looking askance at John roaring with laughter while reading, which turned to amusement when it transpired these were classical texts in Ancient Greek!

### Recognition

John did achieve recognition, although again more internationally than at home. He was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London in 1975 and became a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada.

His greatest accolade came in 1990 when, at the relatively young age of 52, he was awarded the Archaeological Institute of America’s annual Gold Medal for Distinguished Archaeological Achievement, its highest honour.

But perhaps his most important and lasting recognition and accolade is in the hearts of the subsequent generations of pottery specialists who benefited from his generosity and advice.

### John Hayes, the person

While John loved social activity, he was somewhat socially isolated. He presented a rather lonely and shy outsider figure,



**Figure 2.** John Hayes drawing pottery at the Stoa on his last visit to Athens in June 2017 (Photo: John Riley).

especially in social interactions. That said, he liked to party and chat animatedly at sundown over a glass of good wine on the dig verandah.

He devoted himself entirely to his research. Although he never married, he enjoyed an all too brief period of closeness with classical historian Professor Edith Wightman, also based in Canada. At this time John shone with a lightness and brightness, and his normally unkempt appearance noticeably smartened.

This period was brutally truncated when Edith was murdered on 17 December 1983 by an intruder while working late in her office at McMaster University.

Their last joint Xmas card, sent out just before she died and received just afterwards, was joyfully signed simply with drawings of two bells, one entitled 'Ding' and the other, 'Dong'.

### **John Hayes – final years**

In his final years John very much wanted to complete publication of his dated typology of local Roman coarse wares from the Athens Agora excavations, but from about 2015 he was gradually

slipping into decline, manifested by his growing inability to get to grips with version control of his computer manuscript.

He did manage to get back to his beloved Athens one last time for a week in June 2017, visiting the American Agora excavation team in the Stoa and the British School at Athens for a tea. On this visit, glimpses of his old self reappeared – laughing and joking, and speaking fluently in Greek.

Fundamentally John was a caring person, which translated into the very solid inner circle of friends he had in Oxford, coordinated by his former mentee and colleague Dr Philip Kenrick and his wife Sue, both of whom monitored his welfare in his declining years. This circle regularly visited him in his nursing home and, before that, when he was still mobile, would invite him into their homes.

While John's passing is a loss to ceramic studies, his influence lives on through those whom he underpinned and supported at crucial times in their careers.

*This author is one of many grateful mentees*