

Obituary

PROFESSOR J.G. EVANS
1941-2005

John Gwynne Evans was a renowned prehistorian and a leading figure in the development of environmental archaeology, the study of past peoples in relation to their environment. Born in St. Albans in 1941, John was educated at University College School, then at the University of Reading, where he read Zoology. Though tempted by the prospect of postgraduate research in ecology with Charles Elton at Oxford, John chose instead to undertake research at the Institute of Archaeology, London, with two other notable pioneers, Geoffrey Dimbleby and I.W. Cornwall. His research was on the use of stratified land snails in Quaternary deposits as indicators of past environmental change. This earned John the sobriquet 'Snails Evans', in part in recognition of his innovative research on these neglected creatures, and in part to distinguish him from another Institute of Archaeology scholar, the Mediterranean prehistorian John D. Evans.

The thesis became an influential book in 1972, by which time John was Lecturer in the Department of Archaeology at University College Cardiff, as it then was. Further books followed: *The Environment of Early Man in the British Isles* (1975) and *Introduction to Environmental Archaeology* (1978) quickly established themselves as standard works on the subject, and made a significant contribution to moving the study of past environmental change from the fringes of archaeology to its mainstream. For nearly two decades, from 1975 to 1994, John edited the *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*, making it *the* place to publish major excavation reports and research papers.

John was also an active field archaeologist, mainly involved with excavation and regional survey work in southern England, around Stonehenge, Maiden Castle and Avebury, and in South Wales, notably at Stackpole Warren, Dyfed. Although snails and sediments remained at the core of his research, John's breadth of knowledge and experience led him to a particularly deep and complex understanding of all archaeological evidence and the integration of that evidence to understand the role of past peoples in shaping, and responding to, the environment around them. Later books such as *Land and Archaeology* (1999) and *Environmental Archaeology and the Social Order* (2003) showed an increasing pre-occupation

ANTIQUITY 80 (2006): 250–251



with social and cognitive aspects of people and their perception of the world around them. Early retirement in 2002 gave John the uncluttered reading and thinking time that underlies good scholarship. At time of his sudden death from oesophageal cancer, he had just completed work on the second edition of *Environmental Archaeology, Principles and Methods*, and was collating notes and digesting ideas to take his exploration of environment and human psychology into new areas.

Friends and colleagues remember John Evans as a character, often eccentric, sometimes stormy, but a firm friend capable of great kindness. His first marriage ended painfully, but a happy second marriage to Vivian gradually brought a calmer home life that revolved around dogs, allotment and books. John's particular forte was field trips, conducted at a brisk pace across miles of landscape, somehow encompassing the grand sweep of geology

Obituary

and structure equally as well as the minutiae of this or that small flower. He was a fine naturalist, interested in all of the large and small details of the world, and constantly enquiring to find out more. John had a childlike curiosity, with a mischievous sense of humour to match, and a distinctive dress sense that pre-empted 'grunge' by a couple of decades.

The world of archaeology has lost a colleague eminent in the theory and practice of the subject, and many of us have lost a good friend who could turn a country walk into a thoughtful reflection on humanity's place in the world.

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