AGATHA CHRISTIE, ARCHAEOLOGY, & ALZHEIMER’S

On Jan. 22 a large and appreciative audience gathered at St. Paul’s Presbyterian Church to hear Dr. Amy Barron reveal the mystery behind what the three A’s in the title of her talk have in common. She began by asking how many members of the audience had read an Agatha Christie novel. Almost everyone raised their hands.

“Agatha Christie is the best selling author of all time,” she confirmed. “Over four billion of her books have been published in many different languages.” Some of her most famous stories, such as Murder on the Orient Express, are based on her travels to the middle east. Others, like Death on the Nile and Murder in Mesopotamia, make extensive use of her archaeological experiences.

Agatha Christie’s interest in archaeology began when her first marriage ended and the archaeologists, Leonard and Catherine Woolley, invited her to join them on a trip via the Orient Express to their excavations of the ancient city of Ur. “I fell in love with Ur,” she later recalled and “I enjoyed my first experience of living on a dig enormously.”

Between 1922 and 1934 Christie began a long friendship with the Woolleys and frequently spent time with them at Ur. Never satisfied with the role of a spectator, Christie soon became involved in the day to day work of an archaeologist.

At Ur she also met Max Mallowan, who eventually became her second husband. From 1949 to 1958 she worked with Max on the excavations at Nimrud, an important city in the ancient Kingdom of Assyria (900-612 B.C.).

“This is where Agatha and I come together,” noted Dr. Barron. “I did my thesis on some of the artifacts from their excavations that are housed in the British Museum.” She recalled noticing a distinctive sweet odor coming one of the artifacts, a corroded dagger. According to a reference Dr. Barron found in one of Agatha’s journals, she was accustomed to using cloths dipped in honey and cosmetic face cream to clean and preserve the fragile items.

That explains the first two ‘A’s.’ Now what about the third one?

Well, the plot thickens: the link, it turns out, comes from recent research in the new field of neurocognitive literary theory, Dr. Barron explained. Linguists Ian Lancashire and Graeme Hurst, working at the University of Toronto, have uncovered a way to measure the connection between the cognitive deterioration that is associated with Alzheimer’s disease and language function. Using a sophisticated computer program they compared Agatha Christie’s early writing with that of her later years and found a significant decline in her vocabulary and an increase in her use of repetitious and vague expressions- all marks of Alzheimer’s Disease.

“And so, even after death” Dr. Barron concluded, “Agatha Christie continues to help modern science.”

As for the connection among the 3 A’s? Consider that mystery solved!

by Dirk Verhulst
Early Years in Ontario Archaeology:  
Chapter 4

by Bill Fox

Forward

One positive aspect of my transfer to London was a return home or “kewa”, in Anishinabe. Not only did I have the opportunity to reconnect with avocational archaeologists in southern Ontario (although, I had kept in touch through letters and occasional visits), but I was able to interact directly with a variety of former student associates. As the new “Regional Archaeologist for Southwestern Ontario”, I was provided with funding to hire a secretary and a full-time assistant – a “Staff Archaeologist”.

My first order of business was to contact Ian Kenyon. He and Sue had begun their family and Ian was working as an untenured instructor at McMaster University in Hamilton. Luckily for me and Ontario archaeology, Ian accepted the Staff Archaeologist position and the family moved to London, but not before Ian’s cachet had created waves. I had asked Ron if Ian could stay at the Williamson family home, prior to more permanent housing arrangements. Upon seeing their disheveled house guest for the first time, Ron’s mother expressed understandable concern about his appearance – Ian always presented a “laid-back” persona throughout his London days! Term funding was found for a technician and John Wood joined us.

The newspaper advertisement for a secretary resulted in 150 applications; and while the selection process was gruelling, the selected candidate (Betty Kirk) proved worth the effort for many years to come - our team was in place!

“Nowhere to run to, nowhere to hide” – the avalanche begins...

Other than supervising renovations to our new London office (Andrew Weldon’s residence “Chestnut Hill”) at 55 Centre Street, some of my first activities involved producing a short-lived newsletter entitled Southwestern Ontario Archaeology, and working to establish a London chapter of the Ontario Archaeological Society. Early initiatives also included sending out registered letters to known artifact collectors, informing them of the archaeological licensing requirements under the Ontario Heritage Act. The latter resulted in some movement of collections into anonymous storage facilities and rapid communication among the collecting fraternity, culminating in one humorous complaint from a Winona resident who had not received a letter and felt that his status had been injured by the oversight! The first and only two issues of the nascent newsletter were sent to academics working in the region, introducing our new Provincial program.

The first years of field work involved continued surveys of Provincial Parks, such as Pinery at the mouth of the Ausable River, conservation areas, and investigating reports of unmarked grave discoveries. Local University of Western Ontario students were recruited on occasion, courtesy of Dr. Mike Spence, and hired for some of Ian’s summer projects. Beyond surveys of Provincial lands, Ian was given “free rein” to pursue his research interests; resulting in his many seminal articles concerning everything from Archaic broad point sites to 19th century ceramics. Some of his field crew “graduates” include Drs. Chris Ellis, Ron Williamson, and Neal Ferris, and others who went on to careers in Ontario archaeology, such as Gary Foster (Parks Canada) and Martin Cooper (ASI).
Our first major rescue excavation resulted from a report by Charlie Nixon of Ayr, Ontario. He had been actively monitoring and collecting on sites in his area for years, including the Force site. In fact, we had visited that site together in 1971, and in the spring of 1977, he noticed a “For Sale” sign on the property. As noted in Charlie’s archaeological licence report for that year, he had contacted the owners about their development plans and we visited the site in the Fall, as part of the newly formed ACO program (more below). They had no definite plans, but the following spring, Charlie noticed earth being moved on the site in preparation for residential construction. He negotiated access to the topsoil stripped area selected for the house and associated septic field. From April 12 to 17, Ian and I, Charlie and his brother Ed, plus 13 volunteers “shovel shined”, mapped and excavated 87 features associated with a complex pattern of six overlapping longhouses. Pit features produced a wide variety of artifacts and ecofacts, both through quarter inch screening and flotation. A total of 1617.5 litres (roughly 2.5 tons) of soil from 51 features was floated by a student crew consisting of Carl Murphy, Suzanne Campbell, Peter Maclean and Greta Verster. Recovered wood carbon provided four radiocarbon dates, indicating a thirteenth century occupation of the site. It was only three days following our field work that construction recommenced on the site (see Figure 1)

This project established a salvage response model which was repeated often by the London Ministry office thereafter, through the early 80’s. Volunteers from university classes to OAS members to consultant crews arrived on-site at a moment’s notice and subsequently, London Chapter members assisted in artifact processing (along with summer students) which resulted in collections which were washed, sorted, catalogued, and photo-documented. Specialist analyses were often undertaken; including radiocarbon dating, faunal identifications (Janet Cooper or Rosemary Prevec) and floral analyses (Rudy Fecteau or Martin Cooper). For later projects, a brief report would be provided in the London Chapter, KEWA newsletter, but funding and staffing were not available for a full-scale final report. The presence of these collections was communicated to universities, in the hope that graduate students might utilize them for theses or dissertations (which was successfully negotiated, on occasion).

When our team wasn’t in the field, my energies were directed to implementation of statutes requiring mitigation of archaeological impacts caused by development. These included the Environmental Assessment, Niagara Escarpment Planning, and Pits and Quarries Acts. The proclamation of Ontario’s Environmental Assessment Act in 1976 brought heritage assessments to centre stage, particularly for Provincial programs such as highway construction. As early as January of 1977, our Toronto office was discussing highway corridor surveys with the environmental office of the Ministry of Transportation and Communications (MTC) and directing them to contact our London office. The vast majority of construction projects were situated in our Southwestern Region.

Figure 1 Force site excavation, looking northeast
Between 1977 and 1979, a variety of corridor surveys and several salvage projects were accomplished under contract for MTC, to the point that the financial implications became an issue at a Deputy Minister level, and we were informed in early 1980 not to commit to any further projects without the permission of the Historical Planning and a Research Branch Director.

This was pending an inter-Ministerial study of joint expenditures connected with the Provincial highways program and the completion of a series of “case studies” with MTC (including built heritage and landscape components) (Figure 2).

![Figure 2 Rudy Fecteau “Political Cartoon” concerning an MTC proposal about construction monitoring.]

Driver of car replies, “Yeh! We must be paving a Third Millenium B.C. Archaic camp site.”

Driver of paver says, “Holy Jumpin! Isn’t that a Brewerton side notched point?

Between driver of car replies, “Yeh! We must be paving a Third Millenium B.C. Archaic camp site.”

Senior Environmental Planner of the London MTC office resulted in the hiring of Paul Lennox, and the MTC archaeology program was born. Shortly thereafter, a survey project along the new Highway 3 route in southern Essex County provided only limited (read “no”) evidence of substantial archaeological sites. Determined to introduce the new MTC archaeological program to mitigation activities, we required that the Bruner-Colasanti site be further investigated when test units produced only one additional chert flake and a single ceramic microsherd.... Imagine our collective surprise when topsoil stripping exposed 313 features, including a series of large storage pits, the first of which produced a complete ceramic vessel! That experience provided us all with an emphatic “cautionary tale” regarding the assessment of site significance based on surface survey and limited test excavations. The central region of MTC established an archaeology office based in Downview some years later, after receiving a hefty private sector quote for the excavation mitigation of a site on the Hwy. 7 corridor.

Travelling throughout a region which extended from the Niagara River in the east to the Detroit River in the west to Tobermory and Collingwood to the north, it was abundantly obvious that development activities, particularly housing-related, were destroying vast numbers of archaeological sites just in this area of the Province alone....and there was the large Provincial team of Ian, Betty, John and Bill sitting in London, augmented by summer students and volunteers. Speaking of the latter, the establishment of the OAS London Chapter did rally more into the field of archaeological site salvage, with subsequent evenings of artifact processing. Other Chapter activities included bus tours which I organized for members and friends to visit archaeological sites in Ohio, Michigan, and New York. During my tenure as OAS Vice-President and President, I attempted to develop a new Society constitution to better reflect the growing number of chapters (with limited success!); however, my favourite project involved the creation of the J. Norman Emerson silver medal for outstanding avocational contributions to Ontario archaeology.
Ian’s father, Tim Kenyon, was a talented commercial artist and major OAS supporter. He not only produced the London Chapter logo, but also kindly provided several images of Norm for review and selection by the Society membership. Once the image was chosen, Tim finalized the design and supervised the production of the medal dies and several blanks for future presentation. It was with great pleasure that I was able to present the first medal to my mentor, Frank Ridley, just prior to his passing (Figure 3 below). It seemed appropriate that Frank receive this medal depicting another pioneer of Ontario archaeology, with whom he had “locked horns” in the past.

![Figure 3 Bill presents Frank Ridley with the first J. Norman Emerson Medal.](image)

In a desperate attempt to “get a handle” on development activities the Archaeological Conservation Officer Program was established in 1977 (the “Officer” term was determined to be impolitic by managers in Toronto several years later, resulting in the “ACP” acronym, although the program was still referred to as ACOP by members...). Loosely modelled on British Columbia’s volunteer warden program and built on my avocational connections, we recruited participants from across the region, as well as an underwater contingent, based on our work with Stan McClellan, Superintendent of Fathom Five Provincial Park (now a National Marine Conservation Area). During its “heyday” twenty-three members gathered annually for training in London on a variety of resource conservation subjects (artifact identification, mapping, photography, etc.), to exchange information, and attend an appreciation banquet. Throughout the rest of the year these volunteer “wardens” surveyed their areas for new sites and monitored development (and looting) activities; maintaining communication with our office. While this greatly increased our understanding of development impacts across the region, it also placed an added strain on our (very) limited staffing in responding to their reports; although, program members were the first to volunteer for the increasingly numerous rescue excavations. For some members, the monitoring of local sites and liaising with property owners was new, but for others like Charles Garrad, it was just “business as usual”, as he had been involved in his own program for a decade in the Blue Mountain region.

It became clear quite rapidly that, despite our best efforts, we were using “a tin can to bail a sinking ship” in terms of archaeological resource management. Too many significant sites were being lost to uncontrolled development. Following our meeting with the Regional Municipality of Kitchener-Waterloo Planning Department in May of 1979, A.C.O. Jack Redmond began providing archaeological input to development review under the Ontario Planning Act. This was the beginning of a “grass-roots” outreach movement to municipal planning departments, where, one by one, we argued the case for considering archaeological resources in development plans review. By the time that the Revised Planning Act was proclaimed in 1983, the London Ministry office was reviewing subdivision plans for the Regional Municipalities of Kitchener-Waterloo and Niagara, and the City of London.
Thereafter, the Regional Municipality of Hamilton-Wentworth came on board in 1985 and by 1986, the Toronto office of the Ministry was providing input to subdivision plans review for the Halton and York R.M.’s and Bill Ross in the Thunder Bay office was commenting on City of Thunder Bay development. At the same time, the Ministry of Transportation and Communications archaeological program in southern Ontario was booming, managed by Paul Lennox in London and Mary Ambrose in Toronto. Archaeological consulting firms were springing up, too; including, Ron’s Archaeological Services Inc. and Mayer, Pihl and Poulton Ltd., comprising former employees of the large Museum of Indian Archaeology consulting business in London. With support from the Archaeological Conservation Program members, Ontario Archaeological Society, and various university faculty and students across southwestern Ontario, the Ministry program moved into high gear during the early ‘80’s. Despite dwindling financial support from Toronto, the pace of rescue work increased.

Some of the most memorable salvage projects include the Simons and Dymock sites in 1981, Calvert village in 1981/2, and the Six Nations Mohawk and the Elliott villages in 1982. The latter involved close to 200 volunteers during the 40 days of field work. This included a special volunteer, Neal Ferris, who had offered his services to our program the previous year in exchange for free room and board! Limited government funding meant staff accommodation in leaky tents at a local conservation area, suppers of roasted locally grown corn, “being assaulted in the privacy of our tents by rude frogs” (Neal pers. comm.), and evenings of solace in the Delhi Public House, where lovely ladies kept leaving and returning to the establishment as the evenings wore on. When the days stretched to weeks and the weather degenerated, the local rural community rallied behind our small but stalwart crew, as local women arrived unannounced one afternoon, filing across the farm field with trays of baked goods. On another day, a vehicle slowed and stopped on the side of the adjacent concession road. I walked over to say “hello” and was queried by the driver as to what he could do for us. Given the cold, damp weather, I replied “booze”. An hour or so later the same vehicle stopped by and then drove off. I walked over to find a cardboard box containing a variety of opened bottles, evidently donated by concerned local community members! Neal also reminds me of times recording features by headlights, triangulating (literally) 13,000 post holes and then plotting them by hand that winter on long rolls of graph paper – ancient technology, indeed!

The Calvert village (named after local OAS member, Bob Calvert, who located the site) provided our first opportunity to excavate an entire Glen Meyer village. Subsequently, the collection and field data was provided to Peter Timmins for his doctoral dissertation at McGill University – a not uncommon example of cooperation between the academic and government programs in those days.

One other contribution to resource conservation by members of the Archaeological Conservation Program occurred in 1985, with the first successful prosecution for violation of Part VI of the Ontario Heritage Act. We had just been able to negotiate a heritage easement through the Ontario Heritage Foundation with the landowners of one of the last virtually undisturbed Historic Neutral villages in existence, when I discovered evidence of recent looting activity during a site visit. Furious, I contacted the local Hamilton-Wentworth Region Police Department to report the crime, and was lucky enough to connect with an understandably confused criminal investigation detective sergeant. In his many years of CID experience he had never heard of the Ontario Heritage Act, let alone the criminal nature of unlicensed activities on archaeological sites. While Sargeant Crath unravelled the bureaucracy of laying charges under the Act, I requested “word on the street” from our ACO’s. It was not long in coming, as a member of a notorious looting family and two associates were identified as suspects.
After approval to lay charges was obtained from the Minister of Culture and Communications through the Ministry’s legal services, we picked up one of the suspects, who confessed, and drove him out to the Freelton village site. Based on some of the confiscated evidence, it was obvious that they had also been looting a mortuary site and, following an hour of “grilling” on site, the individual finally confessed to their looting activities on another Historic Neutral site near Brantford! I will only relate that our case was successful and the appeal was quashed in short order. Those wishing more details are directed to two London Chapter newsletter articles in KEWA 85-4 and 86-1.

By the mid-80’s, we were scrambling to establish “due process” for development property assessment review and standards for archaeological field work associated with this process. A consultant conference was convened at the London Ministry office in late 1985 to consider these issues. A wide range of papers were presented, representing the views of the nascent archaeological consulting industry, municipalities, and Provincial development agencies, such as Ontario Hydro and MTC. Ministry of Culture and Communications employees also had their say, with presentations by Allen Tyyska, Phillip Wright and Ian Kenyon. Out of this experience, it became clear to me that the application of archaeological conditions to development approvals under the Planning Act now required Provincial government sanction and wider application across Ontario. The only way to achieve this was to move to our head office in Toronto. With the support of Allen Tyyska, the Ministry’s Chief Archaeologist, I transferred to Toronto as the Ministry “Senior Archaeologist” in 1986 (see Figure 4). I should also note that serendipity intervened in 1979 to further extend me. Following successful negotiations with a developer of Italian descent to obtain a year to salvage excavate the Thorold (Historic Neutral) village situated in a subdivision on the brow of the Niagara Escarpment, I brought together faculty from McMaster and Brock Universities to discuss logistical support for the project.

Bill Noble had agreed to undertake the field work, but wanted shower facilities for his crew. David Rupp kindly agreed, and then asked us if we knew of any graduate students who were familiar with designing statistically valid regional surveys. Neither of us could think of a candidate, but upon reflection, I offered to do it and proceeded to design the Canadian Palaepaphos Survey Project in Cyprus. To my surprise, David invited me to supervise the survey in 1980 and I reluctantly agreed, initiating seven summers of field work in Cyprus!

Epilogue

As always, this narrative is merely a portion of the “Provincial story”, as OAS chapters were springing up across Ontario and attempts were made to establish the ACP in other regions. Ironically (as you will discover next), the OAS was funded by the Ministry of Culture and Communications in 1992 to investigate the potential of re-establishing the ACP! However, this effort proved fruitless. For those interested, more details concerning these and subsequent initiatives can be obtained from OAS newsletter articles in Arch Notes and KEWA published during the 1980’s; as well as, the Occasional Papers publications of the OAS London chapter, particularly Number 2 - Archaeological Consulting in Ontario: Papers of the London Conference 1985. As always, I wish to thank veterans such as Ron Williamson and Neal Ferris for “truthing” my account of events!

Fig. 4 London farewell party, including such notables as Christine Dodd, Neal Ferris, Peter Maclean and Peter Timmins (among many others......).
The Peopling of the Americas: New Evidence, Old Controversies
by Dirk Verhulst

Who were the first Americans?

On Nov.27 over 40 members of the local chapter and the general public gathered at St. Paul’s Church to hear Bill Fox, Peterborough Chapter Vice-President, offer some of the current (and often provocative) answers to this fascinating question.

Bill began with the traditional answer we all remember from school: Some 12,000 years ago, during the last ice age, a land bridge existed in what is now the Bering sea. At that time the first inhabitants crossed from Siberia into Alaska. From there they followed an ice free corridor east of the Rockies, eventually spreading throughout North and South America. Their culture, named after a site in Clovis, New Mexico, was marked by the use of large bifacial fluted points closely connected with the hunting of large mammals.

For most of the twentieth century this theory, often referred to as ‘Clovis First,’ was considered archaeological orthodoxy. In recent years, however, the discovery of many pre-Clovis sites in the Americas have challenged the traditional theory.

Bill reviewed some of the most significant sites such as: Monte Verde, Chile 14,800 BP; Buttermilk Creek, Texas 14,000 BP; Cactus Hill, Virginia 15-17,000 BP; Meadowcroft, Pennsylvania 16-19,000 BP; Topper, South Carolina 14-18,000 BP; Pedra Furada, Brazil 30-50,000 BP - very controversial (corrected C14 dates).

The dates and findings from these and many other sites that Bill mentioned steer us in interesting new directions as we search for answers to questions about the peopling of the Americas. He offered some fascinating examples:

a) Following the decreasing age of Clovis sites as we move from the southern United States to Alaska and northern Canada, the actual movement of Clovis people may, in fact, have been in the opposite direction to that stipulated by the traditional theory.

b) Bill reminded us that the Solutrean Hypothesis, first proposed by Stanford and Bradley in the late ‘90’s, suggests remarkable similarities between North American Clovis material culture and that of a somewhat earlier Paleolithic European culture, raising the possibility of European origins.

c) Another possible answer is provided by archaeological evidence for the movement of Maritime people from Asia following the southern edges of the ice that formed during the ice ages. These people likely settled in the Americas earlier than Clovis people. He cited convincing evidence from the West Coast of Canada and the United States of coastal groups who not only survived but flourished on the bounty of the sea as they travelled what Dr. Erlandson has referred to as “the kelp highway.” Recent excavations in Pedra Brazil provide evidence of early cultures, including rock art, some of which may date back to 30,000 years ago, prompting one Brazilian archaeologist to observe that “Americans should excavate more and write less.”

d) Bill also discussed recent genetic (DNA) evidence that provides support for the Solutrean
PHOTOS FROM WINDSOR
BY KATHERINE GRAHAM

Why the OAS Symposium is a “Go To” Event

By Sheryl Smith, OAS Vice-President

Top 10 reasons to attend our annual symposium:

10. You get to stay in a hotel away from (pick one – kids, grandkids, pets, deadlines).

9. The presentations are, for the most part, stimulating and have lots of cool artifact pictures. If they are not stimulating, the room is dark so have a snooze. You probably need it.

8. The local tours sometimes feature wineries. If not, great scenery and lots of interesting historic sites.

7. Organizers put their hearts and souls into providing a great mix of talks, tours, cultural experiences and friendship. And they know where all the best restaurants are.

6. Speaking of friends, you can meet up with people you haven’t seen in a while. Maybe have a beer.

5. If you haven’t attended before, you can make new friends, or hang out with the people you travelled with and meet their friends. Maybe have a beer.

4. The banquet is usually pretty tasty and you can congratulate deserving award winners.

3. The Silent Auction and Book Room are great places to pick up early Christmas gifts for that hard-to-buy-for person on your list.

2. Students and new graduates can schmooze and network with people who are hiring. Or you can hand out business cards and do the hiring.

And the #1 reason you should attend the OAS Symposium:

It is your right as a member to have a say in what goes on, and the Annual Business Meeting is a good place to do it.

Seriously, the OAS symposium is usually an intimate gathering of up to 150 people, so there are lots of opportunities to hear what is going on around the province, meet and interact with members of other chapters, and listen to presentations given by the people whose articles you read in Arch Notes or Ontario Archaeology.

The 2012 Symposium in Windsor featured not only a number of tours and presentations focussed on the War of 1812, but also great talks on the Western Basin Tradition (with American colleagues), Paleoindian sites, and Archaic and Woodland findings. We basked in the warmth of southwesternmost Ontario (it really was warm for November!) and enjoyed each other’s company.

This year’s meeting will be held in late October in beautiful Niagara Falls, at the historic Crowne Plaza Fallsview Hotel, right at the falls. The theme will revolve around the archaeology of Niagara and beyond. Registration and a workshop will be on Friday October 25th. and talks will be in two concurrent sessions all day Saturday Oct. 26th. and Sunday morning October 27th. Watch for further information in upcoming issues of Arch Notes and check the Symposium link on the OAS Website for registration details in the months to come. It really will be a weekend you’ll remember.
Greetings once again!

As President of the Peterborough Chapter, OAS, I’d like to extend my appreciation to all those who have contributed to another successful quarter for the organization. Thanks to Bill Fox, Sheryl Smith and of course editor par excellence, Dirk Verhulst for this issue of Strata. It takes a dedicated group of individuals, working mostly behind the scenes, to keep the chapter afloat. Without their combined efforts, though, we would not be able to offer the educational and entertaining programming that we provide to members and the general public.

Watch for more features in the months to come…new speakers; a tourist’s guide to Ontario Archaeology (just in time for summer jaunts); we are exploring Reel Archaeology - what’s required to show films of an archeological nature as an adjunct to the Speaker’s Series; a field trip for members; and of course a public archaeology day with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority.

If you enjoy your association with the chapter and have not already done so, please consider buying a membership. Your dollars and your numbers go to support ethical archaeology in the Province of Ontario.

We’d like to compile a list of public archaeological exhibits around the province. Not just the ROM and such, but smaller and more out-of-the-way museums with displays that would be of interest to the archaeologically-minded day-tripper. If you can provide a site, a brief description of what is to be found there, and contact information, we’ll compile them for our next issue. Road trip anyone?

Tom Mohr

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