

## Obituary

### Professor Dame Rosemary Jean Cramp, DBE FSA FBA HonFSA Scot

6 May 1929 – 28 April 2023

Rosemary Cramp was the *grande dame* of British archaeology, a cheerful, friendly person, adored by her students and supportive of them in return. In 1971 she was appointed the first woman professor at Durham University. From 2001 to 2004 she served as President of the Society of Antiquaries of London, the most northerly based person at that time to have held the post. Her academic achievements were recognised by the state through the award of CBE in 1987 and then by her elevation to Dame in 2021, and by the academic world through the award of honorary degrees from Bradford, Cambridge, Cork, Dublin, Durham and Leicester, as well as two *Festschriften*.

Rosemary was born in the small village of Cranoe in Leicestershire, the daughter and granddaughter of farmers. Her parents were Robert and Vera Cramp; she had a younger sister, Margaret. Rosemary was educated at Market Harborough Grammar School. Her interest in the past was stimulated by her finds of artefacts in a field behind her father's farm, Ivy House Farm in Glooston. Rosemary wrote for advice to Kathleen Kenyon then (1936–9) excavating the Jewry Wall site in Leicester. A small excavation undertaken by F Cottrill of Leicester Museum in 1946 led to the appreciation that Rosemary's finds related to a Roman villa. But it was to Anglo-Saxon archaeology that Rosemary gravitated when she took up her place at St Anne's College, Oxford in 1947. Following graduation, she was awarded a BLitt in 1950 on the relevance of archaeology to Old English poetry. A subsequent paper, her first, published in the initial volume of the journal *Medieval Archaeology* in 1957 was on 'Beowulf



ILLUS 1 Professor Dame Rosemary Cramp in 2015.  
(Image © Durham University Media Office)

and Archaeology'. One tutor at Oxford was Iris Murdoch, who later dedicated her book *The Sea, The Sea* to Rosemary. While at Oxford, Rosemary gained her first formal experience of excavation when she joined the Durham University training excavation at the Roman fort and town at Corbridge beside Hadrian's Wall, directed by Ian Richmond and John Gillam, later her colleagues. In passing, we may note that the only other Roman excavation in which Rosemary is known to have participated was a small investigation at

Catterick Camp in snow in March 1966. She had been lured there by the report of medieval finds but the site turned out to be Roman in date.

Following five years as a tutor at St Anne's College, Oxford, in 1955 Rosemary took up an appointment as a lecturer in the Department of Archaeology at Durham that was just being formed by Eric Birley. She was to spend the rest of her academic career there, being adlected to professor in 1971, and retiring in 1990. She was appointed a Professor Emerita.

To be a student of Rosemary, as we both were, could initially be a daunting experience. Arriving in Durham in 1962 (D J B) and 1964 (C D M) to study History, we began with four lectures on Roman Britain by Eric Birley and then two lectures on Anglo-Saxon England by Rosemary Cramp. She seemed a formidable lady, and informed us that 'if we didn't work, then we would get thrown out at the end of the year!' But somehow her charisma and commitment for the subject communicated itself and C D M chose her special subject option on Anglo-Saxon England which was taught jointly to English and History students for the next two years (D J B opted for the Roman Britain special subject). The lectures on the course were delivered in a lecture room on Palace Green with Rosemary stamping her foot or banging the floor with her pointer, to indicate to the slide-machine operator when to change slides. Every so often, she would stop and, with a beady stare, demand of one of the students a description and commentary upon one of the objects displayed on the screen. We were also required to learn Old English with Rosemary, weekly at nine in the morning in her study in the Old Fulling Mill. This overall academic experience was challenging but ultimately rewarding for both myself (C D M) and Malcolm Baker, friend and colleague, who were inspired by Rosemary to move seriously on, into archaeology and art history respectively. (Fellow members of the Society will remember Malcolm from his time at the Royal Scottish Museum (as it was then), and now as a distinguished art historian.)

Away from purely academic activities, Rosemary showed her personal touch and pastoral care in those days to her special subject

students – later, of course, to the wider community of archaeology students. What could appear to some students to be a fierce exterior actually masked an extremely caring individual whose humanity was extended to many students while at university and often for many years afterwards. Many of us who came into contact with Rosemary as young and naïve students have all had our lives enriched by our experiences then. The effect on our lives was especially important for those like myself (C D M) who returned to join her staff in the Archaeology Department later in the 1970s and 1980s and have been able to count her as a very dear and close friend right up to her final years.

At Oxford Rosemary had studied the works of the Venerable Bede, and her arrival in Durham coincided with the redevelopment of the area around St Peter's Church, Monkwearmouth. In 1959 she commenced her campaign of excavations, which in 1963 embraced the other part of the Anglo-Saxon Monastery, Jarrow. The two sites were very different, with St Peter's being surrounded by rows of terraced houses while St Paul's in Jarrow stood in a graveyard. Rosemary was able to demonstrate that the monastic buildings had different plans in spite of the fact that the two sites formed the twin monastery which was the home of the Venerable Bede. She was able to put life into the statement that Benedict Biscop built in stone in the Roman manner with, for instance, her excavations producing architectural fragments and baluster shafts. Also, as Rosemary herself stated, the sites produced 'exotic pottery and the greatest quantity of 7th to 8th century coloured window glass from any site of comparable date in Europe' – including reconstructable geometric and figural leaded windows. Inevitably, she became a renowned expert on this subject and collaborated with other academics, many in the scientific sphere. The report was published in two substantial volumes in 2005 and 2006.

As is obvious from these reports, Rosemary was very active as an excavation director, often intervening on site as needed, for instance with planning and photographing or indeed inducting raw young student excavators on their 'training



ILLUS 2 Rosemary Cramp at Monkwearmouth, 1959. (Image © Department of Archaeology, Durham University)

dig' in the basic skills of excavation. But she was also hands-off when she recognised the abilities of others, as when she handed over the Jarrow Slake 'rescue' project to C D M to run alongside the main churchyard excavation, and placed the planning at Jarrow in the hands of D J B in 1966. Also, she called on the specialist skills of technical colleagues in the department to assist on site as appropriate – as they also did with other departmental projects elsewhere. This was in tune with her philosophy of the necessary interaction of the practical and academic aspects of archaeology to illuminate the past.

Rosemary's interest in the sites did not stop there. She worked with the local community and regional politicians to establish a centre at Jarrow Hall near the church called 'Bede's World', to raise awareness of the history and archaeology of this outstanding site in the wider public and among schoolchildren. Central to this was the link of Benedict Biscop, the founder of the monastery, directly to the then cradle of the western Christian world, as witnessed by his journeys to Rome, and by the lifelong presence at the monastery of the Venerable Bede. It was important to

give people in a depressed area of the North East some pride in their past.

Early in her career Rosemary wrote a seminal paper on the Anglian sculptured crosses of Dumfriesshire, including the Ruthwell Cross, published in 1959–60, and this was followed up in her Jarrow Lecture of 1965 on 'Early Northumbrian sculpture'. At the time of this lecture Rosemary had already been finding significant pieces of stone sculpture at her monastic sites and had begun the process of recording and cataloguing Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture from the northern counties of England. This interest in sculpture led Rosemary to conceive of a corpus of early medieval stone sculpture for England. Her persistence and perseverance enabled the *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Sculpture* (1984–2024) to be supported by the British Academy and other trusts; it currently extends to 14 volumes, with Rosemary writing and editing seven of these, but also collecting together a group of up to 30 other like-minded specialists – a true sign of her doggedness and vision. Appropriately enough, her first 'double' volume was of Durham and Northumberland in 1984.

Rosemary also continued her interest in church archaeology, once most of the work at Monkwearmouth–Jarrow was completed. Indeed, there was a period of overlap when she became involved in a Borders project – at The Hirsel, Coldstream in Berwickshire, which she excavated together with her friend Caroline Douglas-Home. Initial indications of an ecclesiastical site were noticed when ploughing in June 1977 turned up carved stones in a field on the estate and documentary research indicated the existence of a chapel there by 1165–6 (published in *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 109 (1977–8)). Geophysical surveying and five seasons of excavation then followed, from 1977 to 1984. Although there was some prehistoric evidence, the focus was upon the church and associated cemetery from the 10th century onwards. As Rosemary herself stated, in summary in her monograph published in 2014:

This is the most complete excavation of a proprietary church in Scotland, which developed from a single-cell drystone building into a substantial church of cut and mortared stone. It was granted to the nearby Priory of Coldstream in 1165, only to be put out of

ecclesiastical use, ruined, turned to lay use and finally burnt before being firmly sealed over with rubble by the 17th century. This is then a remarkably detailed story of a church at a period when the parochial structure in Scotland was being developed and very little is known about the relationship of estate churches and the monasteries to which they were donated.

Rosemary was always interested in matters Scottish, and a substantial paper of hers, also from the Borders, was that concerning the Anglian sculpture from Jedburgh published in 1983 in the *Festschrift* for Robert Stevenson. In 1994 she contributed to the conference at Govan on the early medieval sculpture there, both by contributing to the Conclusions and by analysing the recumbent cross-slabs. She also followed up her early paper on Ruthwell in the definitive discussion she wrote of the Bewcastle Cross in relation to Ruthwell in the second volume of the *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Sculpture* in 1988. Even 29 years later Rosemary was still concerning herself with a group of bosses from cross-heads, including one from Jedburgh, this time, remarkably, in a *Festschrift* for her first research student, Richard Bailey, on his 80th birthday.



ILLUS 3 Rosemary Cramp at Stowe Nine Churches, 2017. (Image © Professor Jo Story)

The considerable detail of her discussion about this cross-head, with its metalwork parallels and Eucharistic symbolism, indicates the sharpness of her academic brain even at the age of 88.

Her influence on archaeological developments in Scotland is reflected through her active contributions as a long-term member of the Royal Commission for the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, and through her preparedness to bring together disparate groups such as the National Trust for Scotland, Glasgow Museums and her own university to establish a new archaeological project on St Kilda in the 1980s. The late Peter Hill wrote in 2001 that ‘Rosemary Cramp was a founding member of the Whithorn Trust, and has been one of its staunchest supporters over the years, a token of which is that she had previously contributed the third Whithorn lecture in 1994 on “Whithorn and the Northumbrian expansion westwards”.’ She also could seize opportunities for her own younger colleagues, as she did for myself (C D M) and John Hunter during a conversation with her old friend Cecil L Curle (née Mowbray) that led to establishing a new project on the Brough of Birsay, Orkney. She enabled this to grow into a major Birsay Bay Project in the 1970s and 1980s at Durham and supported the first two publications there. It was, then, a poignant moment to be able to ‘close the book’ in 2021 with the presentation of the third volume of the project, dedicated to her just at the point when her health was beginning to fail.

Rosemary contributed to British archaeology in many ways through service in societies and on committees, including as a Trustee of the British Museum, and of the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England (later Historic England), Chair of the Archaeology Data Service, and President of the Council for British Archaeology, the Society for Church Archaeology, the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society, and the Durham and Northumberland Architectural and Archaeological Society. She served a term as Chair of the Hadrian’s Wall Advisory Panel.

To return to Durham, and its Department of Archaeology. Rosemary inherited an

academic staff of four. Over the next two decades she created one of the largest departments of Archaeology in the UK, deliberately expanding it in broader chronological and geographical directions, as well as developing aspects of scientific archaeology and archaeological conservation. She also oversaw the move of the department from the Old Fulling Mill beside the River Wear to much more substantial accommodation in Saddler Street catering for an active fieldwork department and able to house English Heritage laboratories – to such a degree that a former University Registrar complained that ‘the department seemed to be like a weed spreading up and down the street’!

Rosemary would have regarded her students as her greatest achievement, so it is fitting that among all the anecdotes about her, we have chosen one from Richard Bailey, her first PhD student:

I was reflecting recently on the first year of excavations at Monkwearmouth in 1959, among the (then) tightly packed houses to the south of the church. It is a measure of how impoverished was our equipment and backup that we carried our spades, buckets etc by bus every morning from Durham to Sunderland because there was no storage. Before we finished every evening. Rosemary took a dear lady whose back yard had been excavated to reveal a cemetery, past the skeletons so that she could reach her outside netty and then lock herself in her house until we arrived next morning. Every morning she served us tea in her best cups and saucers.

Richard Bailey was undoubtedly one of the first of a long line of Rosemary’s former students to achieve professorial status in universities. Similarly, most of the younger colleagues she appointed also moved on to similar appointments elsewhere. But, equally, many Durham graduates and postgraduates made it into the wider archaeological and heritage community, of whom a not-insignificant number (including D J B) have contributed at senior levels particularly to the furtherance of professional values, knowledge and protection in relation to heritage, museums and archaeology in Scotland.

A great memorial to Rosemary is the interest in Anglo-Saxon and early medieval archaeology in Britain that she stimulated through her excavations and publications and through her influence in other national bodies and universities. Rosemary was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 2006, while the Society of Antiquaries of London awarded Rosemary its Gold Medal in 2008 for her ‘distinguished services to archaeology’. Rosemary’s name and influence continues through the Rosemary Cramp Fund established by the Department of Archaeology, Durham University, to recognise individuals and groups who make a significant contribution to the archaeology and heritage of British and Irish archaeology.

Her funeral in May was held at her own place of worship in Durham and was attended by family, friends, current and former colleagues, and students across the years. The official memorial service was held in Durham Cathedral on 14 July 2023 in the presence of an enormous congregation led, appropriately, by her friend Sir David M Wilson representing the Duke of Gloucester. The eulogy was delivered by her successor in the Chair of Archaeology at Durham, Anthony Harding, which he concluded as follows: ‘She was truly one of the most remarkable persons most of us will ever know. Rosemary, we miss you and we thank you for letting us share a part of your long and busy life.’

DAVID J BREEZE HONFSASCOT AND CHRISTOPHER D MORRIS FSASCOT