

Frank Richard Clark: 17th March 1921 - 3rd June 2017

WEAG Stalwart

Family, friends and WEAG members gathered at St. Paul's Church, Woodford Bridge on Wednesday 5th July 2017 to celebrate the long life of Frank Clark. He had been a choir boy here in the 1920s! The cremation followed at the Forest Park Cemetery and Crematoria, Forest Road, Hainault and concluded with a gathering at the Crown & Crooked Billet, Woodford Bridge.

Frank Richard Clark



Photograph Courtesy of Frank's Family

For about 30 years, from the 1960s to the 1980s, Frank Clark was the backbone and guiding light of the West Essex Archaeological Group. Although always an amateur archaeologist he supervised or worked with others on archaeological research, excavation and publication in south-west Essex, including the Metropolitan London Boroughs east of the River Lee. Ill health sadly curtailed his field work in the last 25 years or so, but he was always willing, until quite recently, to assist and advise others, giving freely his time and great knowledge to all those who consulted him.

Family Matters:

Frank was born on 17th March 1921. He was the first child of Frank Joseph Clark (1892-1982), a mental nurse at Claybury Asylum, and Bessie Grace Cole (1894-1978) who had married on 8th June 1920. His paternal grandfather, Richard Clark (1848-1927), an undertaker manager, was born in London and had 10 children. A younger sister Joyce M. Clark was born in 1923 and served as a Redbridge Councillor and Mayor 1980-1981 with Frank as her Consort.

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Frank married Maria Hildegonda Verhees (1917-2007), of Dutch heritage, but whose family had lived in Yorkshire since the early 1900s, at Woodford Bridge, on 3rd April 1948. They had two sons, Richard, born 1949, and Peter, born in 1952, and in the fulness of time, were blessed with grandchildren and great grandchildren. The family lived in Waltham Road, Woodford Bridge for many years.

Career:

Frank was interested in engineering and joined the RAF as a teenager in the late 1930s. He served in a ground crew and maintenance team throughout the Second World War, reaching the rank of Sergeant. Frank was based in Sicily; Malta during the second great siege of 1940-1942 and later in Egypt where he visited the pyramids and tombs thereby developing his lifelong passion for archaeology. He later followed a career with the North Thames Gas Board for many years and was awarded the Queen's Silver Jubilee medal in 1977. Eventually Frank curated their museum at Bromley-by-Bow, where he welcomed visitors and promoted their collection, until he retired.

Archaeological work:

About 1960 Frank noticed a WEAG poster displayed in his local public library at Thurlby House and became involved in the fledgling WEAG. The Group, which was founded a few years earlier, was then largely composed of teachers. He soon immersed himself in archaeology, which complemented his interest in geology, and successfully studied for an Archaeological Diploma.

Members of WEAG, and other societies will recall Frank's very warm personality and his excellent interpersonal skills. His qualities were manifold, being a good organiser and team player who instantly made everyone feel welcome, especially new comers. In addition, he maintained excellent relationships with professional archaeologists, museum professionals, including Harvey Sheldon; Ian Robertson, Pat Wilkinson and Terry Turbin of the Passmore Edwards, Ian Jones and Richard Bartlett at Harlow Museum; landowners and tenant farmers, including Mr. Norwood of Woolston Hall and Mr. Padfield of Piggots Farm; and Mr. John Hiscott of the Chase, Abridge.

WEAG benefitted from his long-term commitment to the Group. Frank served on the Committee and numerous subcommittees, as well as chairman and Vice-president. Frank's colleagues here included Reg Brooks, the long-term treasurer, Dennis Cousins and Joan Barker the secretaries; Jim Berry, Terry Betts, Madge Carter, Ginger Clare, Edgar and David Cronin, Eric Dorrington, Ernie Fulcher, Betty Gobel, Fred Harvey, Alan and Jean Hemming, Ian Millar, Brian Moore, Viola Parr, Don Pratt and Billie Bell, Eric Taylor, Bob Terry, Paul Tully, Jeff & Christine Wiskin, Vi Young, and numerous others.

Frank worked alongside many professional and amateur archaeologists including Terry Betts on the M11, Betty Gobel and Norman France at Harlow Roman Temple Site, Peter Huggins at Waltham Abbey, Eric Dorrington at High

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Beach Pillow Mound; Julian Litten at St. Mary's Church, South Woodward, Wally Davey at Harlow, and John Camp at Aldersbrook.

Frank was never known to be fazed by any challenge. His great depth of knowledge allowed him to excavate an incredibly wide range of archaeological sites from the Palaeolithic to the modern day, including rescue and research excavations. All sites were tackled with a well thought out and executed plan of action ranging from getting landowners permission, mustering a team of diggers, arranging the erecting of the WEAG shed on site, latrines, planking, wheelbarrows, shovels, spades and other hand tools, surveying equipment and most importantly a tea urn. All this was done smoothly and without any fuss ready for the start of the dig. His regular annual digs at Little London were always a great joy to attend, especially as he also had the knack of invariably arranging good weather!

Main sites:

Perhaps Frank's greatest legacy is the work he carried out, between 1972 and 1981, at the Romano-British site of Little London or Durolitum, near Abridge, which led to the important discovery of a 2nd-4th century A.D. bath house, hypocaust and several timber-lined wells. Eric Dorrington undertook a further excavation in 1990 and all the results were published in 1998. Frank personally arranged the publication of this report after the original printers, the Woodgrange Press, went out of business, with the loss of all the original drawings. Unfazed, Frank and one of his sons, with the assistance of Alan Hemming, produced camera ready copy for another printer. Finds included 46 burials (mainly cremations but also one child inhumation), more than 84 coins, a meat cleaver, an iron and bronze crescent axle linch pin, Roman shoe, Roman jewellery, animal bones and much pottery.

Earlier Frank had helped Norman France and Betty Gobel at Harlow Roman temple 1962-1971, but it was due to Frank's determination and dedication that the site was eventually written up and published. Frank also arranged the further excavation of the High Beech Mesolithic site.

The Roding valley was also the scene for digging at Abridge Roman Villa with Reg Brooks, Whittal's Field Iron Age enclosure and medieval Woolston Hall Mill. The enigmatic Roman Villa site in Wanstead Park was also explored and interesting finds made. In the Woodford area, he worked on the George Public House; St. Mary's Church and the Jolly Wheelers. Further south he worked at St. George's Church, Gants Hill, Ilford.

Sadly, Frank's field work was severely curtailed by Guillain-Barre Syndrome which attacked his nerve endings and left him bed ridden for two years. Although he made a very good recovery he was sadly left with restricted mobility but his mind was as sharp and active as ever.

Frank was a very responsible archaeologist and ensured he was surrounded by a good team of field walkers, diggers, surveyors, pot washers, caterers, and

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researchers. He ensured post excavation work was carried out and reports written up and published in journals and by the West Essex Archaeological Group; Passmore Edwards Museum and Harlow Museum. He was rightly proud of his publication record. Frank also ensured all finds and papers were safely deposited with the appropriate museum or archive, for others to use. The Passmore Edwards Museum, now closed, was the main repository for WEAG's artefacts.

Once Frank decided to stand back from active field work and routine research he generously donated his library to the Essex Archaeological Society for the benefit of students and other researchers. He also produced for newer WEAG members a set of bullet point notes, based on his many years of experience, on how to organise a 'dig'. His hobbies outside archaeology included needlepoint and gardening.

Frank was a one off. He was a true amateur who loved his archaeology and infectiously shared his passion with others. Frank's rich blend of skills sustained WEAG for many years and his digging and publication record is second to none. Those that knew him will miss him sorely. WEAG has lost a true friend whose poor mobility in later years, deprived newer members of the benefit of his wide expertise and wise counsel.

Main publications

Litten, J.W.S. & Clark, F.R. 1977. *St. Mary's Church, Woodford, Essex*. Published by Passmore Edwards Museum. 66 pages. ISBN 978-0906123003.

France, N.E., Gobel, B.M., Jones, I.K. & Clark, F.R. 1985. *The Romano-British temple at Harlow, Essex: a record of the excavations carried out by members of the West Essex Archaeological Group and the Harlow Antiquarian Society between 1962 and 1971*. Published by Sutton for West Essex Archaeological Group. 139 pages.

Clark, F.R. 1990. *Exploration and discovery in south-west Essex. A Series of Reports on Excavations Carried Out by the West Essex Archaeological Group*. Published by West Essex Archaeological Group. 120 pages. ISBN 0951479008.

Clark, F. R. 1998. *The Romano-British Settlement at Little London, Chigwell*. Published by West Essex Archaeological Group. 132 pages. ISBN 0951479016.

A list of other WEAG excavations is included on the inside back cover of *Exploration and discovery in south-west Essex*.

Prepared by Frank's good friend William (Bill) George – for further information please contact Bill on william-george@lineone.net

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