

SALLY CHRISTIAN & ARCHAEOLOGY



The Sally Christian Fund – text from Sally Christian

“The idea for this fund came about after hearing the disappointment of many fellow students who were unable to attend external training courses on various aspects of Archaeology because of restriction of financial resources.

“Sometimes this was just that they did not have enough money to pay for the course, or it was that they could not afford to take the time off work and pay the fees as well.

“For others they felt that the existing demands of their fees for their studies already impacted on the family budget and that it was unfair on the rest of the family for them to use more money for additional courses that were not a compulsory part of their course.

“Many of the students come to their studies in archaeology with amateur experience of fieldwork via membership of local archaeological societies and they already have a knowledge and understanding of the subject and many have already defined their specific areas of interest.

“Many other students, including me, have wanted to study the subject for many years but have had no practical involvement other than visiting sites and information from books and the media.

“My initial criteria for the fund was to provide money for training courses, including the University Excavation Techniques course, but also courses on other aspects of archaeology that students relatively new to the subject could use to explore their areas of interest.

“Such short courses as archaeological illustration, pottery, flints and others run by archaeological societies locally and around the country.

“It is my intention that as many people as possible benefit from the fund and specifically those at the earlier stages of their studies and those who have had less exposure to archaeology and have more ground to gain!”

Sally Christian’s archaeological journey - text provided by Peter Christian

While Sally Christian came to formal study of archaeology only later in life, her interest in archaeology probably started young — there were certainly books on ancient Greece and Egypt in the family home.

Her father, who generally had little time for television, would nonetheless keenly turn on the family set for any program about the distant past, and had a particular interest in the Minoans.

Sally’s first direct experience of an active archaeological site would have been a school visit to the Roman villa at Lullingstone, which was still being excavated at the time.

Her path almost took an academic route, but she chose not to take up a place in Southampton to study Geography, and rather started to develop the skills which culminated, twenty years later, in the conversion of the former Anglican convent of Dudwell St Mary in Burwash into a well-respected nursing home, which she managed for a decade.

Sally's connection with Sussex, in fact, goes back several centuries: her earliest known paternal ancestor, Martin Christian, lived at Horseye on the Pevensey Levels, where he and his descendants grazed their livestock for almost 250 years, before increasing poverty drove them to the nearby towns and on to London, where Sally was born.

Her brother's researches into the family's Sussex homes and locations certainly fostered an increasing interest in the county's local history, both in its physical fabric and in the lives of its inhabitants.

Once the nursing home was up and running, the need for occasional escape from a demanding business led Sally and her partner to purchase a remote property on the Argyllshire coast. This included within its boundaries a number of sites of archaeological interest, with, at its centre, the 11th-century Keills Chapel and its remarkable 8th-century cross.

It is here, with ancient remains on her doorstep and, indeed, to some extent under her protection, that Sally's serious engagement with the evidence of the past began.

When it became time to sell the nursing home and wind down, Sally had, for the first time in her adult life, the opportunity for formal study, and the search for a new challenge unsurprisingly led her to the course in archaeology which provided such stimulation in her difficult final years.

She had her own difficulties in meeting the demands, physical and otherwise, of the course, and though in her case the limitations were medical in origin rather than financial, this no doubt made her particularly sensitive to the sort of claims of everyday life that for many other beginning students had an impact on their ability to pursue their interest fully in a formal educational setting.

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