

CHRISSIE HARRISON 17.12.1950 - 28.07.2026

After a debilitating illness, Chrissie passed peacefully in her sleep with her beloved daughter Blaise by her side at the Sussex County Hospital, Brighton. Chrissie will be remembered by her wide circle of friends for her warm, supportive personality, her spirituality and her winning smile as much as for her major contributions to the DUA in its Golden Age. She joined the Museum of London team in January 1974: over the next 20 years, she proved to be an accomplished excavator, site supervisor and exceptional illustrator.

HER BACKGROUND Her father, working in the Prison Service, regularly moved his family from posting to posting, initially from Wormwood Scrubs to Lewes and then, when she was a teenager, to the Isle of Portland in Dorset. The prison there overlooked a naval dockyard, where the local college offered technical drawing training: ever the rule-breaker, she took the course as the only girl in the class (consequently she produced the complex axonometric projections used in the Trig Lane report, for example). The next posting, a dramatic change, was to Pentonville Prison in darkest Holloway. Now aged 17, she studied fashion design in Leicester Square (hence her keenly-developed sense of style and the uncluttered clarity of her archaeological illustrations). Her new home backed onto the tall prison wall, but was opposite a rundown terrace which included a bunch of would-be writers, students and wannabe musicians, one of whom subsequently proposed to her.

BECOMING AN ARCHAEOLOGIST A few years later, although separated, we remained close friends. But as both our careers folded in a severe recession, lacking degrees or suitable training, we nevertheless decided to become temporary archaeologists in the City's brand new excavation unit. So in 1974, we worked together at New Fresh Wharf, and then Trig Lane (1974-76) where she finally made her mark. She then worked on major Roman and medieval sites at Peninsular House, Pudding Lane (1979-82), Leadenhall Court (1984-7) and finally Thames Exchange (1989-91): on the latter site, she supervised a controlled excavation area larger than that at BIG82.

Beyond the City walls, she worked on the legendary Deserted Medieval Village site at Wharham, Yorkshire, as well as hulk recording on the Medway foreshore (with a diversion to the Bronze Age Boat in Dover), in Punic Carthage (Tunisia) and Roman Ostia. She was much travelled, and lived in Spain for several years before returning to the UK.

MULTI-TALENTED On-site, she could record at speed at 1:10 or 1:20 (with or without planning frames): she could draw straight lines without a ruler, and perfect circles without a compass. In post-excavation, she developed her own illustrative skills, in an age of 6h pencils, Rotring pens, Letraset and scalpel blades (how many readers will understand that sentence?) but subsequently embraced I pads and the new technology. By chance, three Trig Lane veterans, Chrissie, John Burke-Easton and myself, ended up in Hastings. Here we began writing up the Thames Exchange site that she had supervised almost 40 years earlier.

Also known for her unique sense of style, she introduced red wellington bootlets to waterfront archaeology (no steel toe caps then) and, in 1976, undertook the first Thames archaeological foreshore survey in a full-length fur coat (well, it was cold that November). Unforgettable.

Gustav Milne

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