

## Nicolas Coldstream

*This obituary by Alan Johnston is an edited version of one that appeared in the Guardian on July 4 2008. It is reproduced by kind permission of the Guardian*

John Nicolas Coldstream, Emeritus Yates Professor of Classical Archaeology, who died suddenly at the age of eighty on March 21<sup>st</sup> 2008, was one of the leading scholars of Greek Archaeology of his generation, and most certainly made the field of the early Iron Age in Hellenic lands, c.1000–700 BC, his own, through both his publications and his teaching.

He came to the field after Eton and King's Cambridge and a short spell teaching at Shrewsbury School. A year was spent in the Greek and Roman Department of the British Museum, then a studentship at the British School at Athens, whence he moved to Bedford College in 1960; he was awarded a personal chair there in 1975. As a result of the rationalization of Classics departments

in the University, while most staff from Bedford departed to Royal Holloway College at Egham, in 1983 Nicolas was translated south to fill the Yates Chair of Classical Archaeology at UCL, vacated by Peter Corbett, thus becoming the sixth holder of that title to emerge from the nursery of the BM. Lofty in stature but not demeanour, he was welcomed indeed by another tall Cambridge pianist, the Provost of UCL, Sir James Lighthill. He retired concomitantly with the merging of the Department of Classical Archaeology with the Institute in 1992; he had become an Honorary Fellow, and continued his connections with the College, not least with the Chamber Music Society. His last engagement at UCL was to present a lecture on the inauguration of the A.G. Leventis Gallery of Cypriot and Eastern

Mediterranean Archaeology on 8th November 2007.

Throughout his career he trained an impressive number of postgraduate students, now to be found from Dublin to Nicosia and many places between. Many contributed to a *Festschrift* volume in 1995, and, more unusually, he co-authored in 1993 the publication of a Cypriot tomb group, housed in the Institute of Archaeology collection, with his entire class of ten for the MA course in Cypriot Archaeology, the only one then offered in Great Britain.

Though he was not as precocious as the young Mozart, who reeled off a few symphonies while living briefly in the house in Ebury Street where the Coldstreams famously entertained, he was almost as prolific. Articles poured from his pen (he never engaged with IT), on a range of topics that demonstrated the breadth of his interest and knowledge, ranging from Tyre to Huelva, often focusing on the most recent important



*Nicolas Coldstream speaking at the inauguration of the A. G. Leventis Gallery of Cypriot and Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology at the Institute of Archaeology UCL in November 2007*

finds, such as at Pithekoussai on Ischia and Lefkandi on Euboea. His own excavational work concentrated on Kythera, where with George Huxley he pioneered research on the connections between Crete and the mainland in the Bronze Age), and his beloved Knossos, a rich site long after Minos; all of this he saw to publication, as well as much dug by others at Knossos. The core to his work, that for which he is rightly lauded throughout the archaeological community, was his study of the pottery of the earlier first millennium BC; his *Greek Geometric Pottery* (1977) is only surpassed by the second edition, published posthumously; his students and admirers plan a further supplementary volume on the topic. The broader view was not neglected: in 2003 he published a second edition of *Geometric Greece* (2003), where he tackled the history of the period, perforce dependent largely on archaeological evidence, with a clarity and freedom from jargon which was always a hallmark of his approach.

The excavations at Knossos were conducted under the aegis of the British School at Athens, which he served as MacMillan Student, Editor of the *Annual*, Chairman of the Managing Committee and then Vice-President. He was about to set off to a colloquium in his honour in Athens (involving many of his pupils) when he died; it became a fitting, and academically impressive, memorial meeting.



*Late Geometric Attic tankard in the Institute collection first published by Nicolas Coldstream in his "Greek Geometric Pottery"*

Nicolas (Alas, few remember, no "h") did not seek administrative work, but it is worth recounting that he took on at short notice the organization of the eleventh International Conference of Classical Archaeology in UCL in 1978, which became the only British-Academy sponsored event then to make a profit. We should not however make any connection between that and his election to a Fellowship, in 1977.

One of his great strengths was his humanity, in that he was fully at ease with all, from child to peer – and however many stages between. He was an excellent

smoother of ruffled feathers, such as when chairing a session in a conference in the BM he was able to snatch a break during a heated argument between two Italian colleagues on a relatively obscure Etruscan matter to announce that there did not appear to be a consensus emerging and that it was time for lunch. He has attempted a similar feat in several more recent articles on the thorny issue of the contribution of Greek pottery to the dating of sites in the Holy Land. A point which he continually made in print and conversation was that in this difficult area of dating in protohistory it is not the individual object that decides the issue but the collective "voice" of the whole corpus of indicative material.

There is an ongoing *Nachlass*, involving the second edition of *GGP*, as it is known to all in the trade, and, to bring the wheel full circle, the full publication of the pottery of "his" period in the British Museum. We will see there one of the many artistic talents of his wife, Nicola, whose drawings have always supplemented his texts.

*John Nicolas Coldstream, archaeologist, born 30th March 1927, died 21st March 2008.*

## The Peter Ucko Archaeological Trust

The Peter Ucko Archaeological Trust (Charity Commission no.1127398 ) has been set up in memory of Peter Ucko, formerly Director of the Institute of Archaeology and founder of the World Archaeological Congress. The objects of the Trust are to promote the exchange of information resulting from archaeological research; provide financial assistance (to indigenous and economically disadvantaged people) for education and training in archaeology, heritage management, and associated disciplines, and support any activity addressing inequalities and cultural conflict in the context of archaeological heritage and cultural property. The Trust will endeavour to promote respect for human rights by individuals and organizations and to protect the rights of indigenous people over their cultural property, including ancestral human remains.

For as long as WAC continues to uphold the values that Peter believed to be integral to it, the intention (in the first instance) is to provide financial support to indigenous and economically disadvantaged people to facilitate their participation in international meetings of WAC. The Trust was set up with £50,000 from Peter's estate, but it is hoped that this sum will be added to, and thus enable the Trust to expand its activities.

The Trust welcomes donations, however small or large. Donations may be sent to Barbara Brown, Institute of Archaeology, 31–34, Gordon Square, London WC1H 0PY.

Donations can be sent immediately to the above address (for the attention of Mary Carey). If you would prefer to wait until the Charity Registration Number is received, donations may be made by way of pledges. Donors will be notified when the Charity Registration Number is available and the pledges redeemed. Donations can be made by cheque, or by bank transfer to the William Sturges & Co Client account, National Westminster Bank, Sort code: 56-00-33, Account number: 48327042 (Ref: Peter Ucko Archaeological Trust).

Trustees: Jane Hubert, Professor Peter Stone, Dr Siân Jones, Professor Stephen Shennan, Professor Sir Robert Boyd.