

## *DAVID B. WHITEHOUSE (1941–2013)*



David Whitehouse welcomes HRH Princess Alexandra to the British School at Rome, October 1976. © British School at Rome Photographic Archive (BS 467).

David Whitehouse died on 17 February 2013 at the age of 71. A great and innovative scholar, he was also a courteous and gently entertaining person. Despite being the key expert on ancient Roman, medieval and Islamic glass, he remained an extremely modest person, very generous with his knowledge and time, as many younger scholars were to appreciate.

David Whitehouse is now most known for his excavations at the ancient city port of Siraf in the Persian gulf and for his studies on Roman, medieval and Islamic glass as Director of the Corning Museum of Glass. However, he was at the centre of the birth of medieval archaeology as a discipline in Italy; and

under his Directorship (1974–84), the British School at Rome maintained a major role in Italian medieval archaeology.

He first specialized in early medieval and medieval Italian ceramics, where his research truly can be defined as ground breaking. Chris Wickham, in his synthesis of the long-standing contribution of the BSR to Italian medieval archaeology, published in *Papers of the British School at Rome* in 2001, highlighted the early 1960s as the period that saw the most important change in medieval studies: one of the two reasons he gave for this was the contribution of David Whitehouse. Later, during his Directorship of the BSR, he was to continue and expand the work he carried out in the 1960s, with a series of key excavations focusing on the elusive transition period between late antiquity and the Middle Ages. Today, medieval archaeology in Italy is a well-established and flourishing, scientific discipline, and it is difficult to appreciate fully the enormous contribution made by Whitehouse 50 years ago. However, one only has to read the numerous articles he published at the time to grasp the singular importance of his research and its implications. As Richard Hodges, another former Director of the BSR, has noted (in an appreciation in *Antiquity*), David Whitehouse was one of the main scholars who helped transform an antiquarian discipline into a professional one.

Whitehouse grew up in the village of Wildmoor near Bromgrove, Worcestershire, and took part in excavations when still at school. He went on to read Archaeology and Anthropology at St John's College, Cambridge, and remained to take a Ph.D. on medieval ceramics from southern Italy. Whilst he was undertaking his Ph.D. he won a Scholarship to the British School at Rome for two years, and by 1966 had completed his thesis. He also published an article in *Medieval Archaeology* (1965) on the early medieval glazed pottery 'Forum ware', which was a major breakthrough for Italian medieval archaeology, for the first time proposing a chronology (later confirmed as correct) for the ware. In addition to this, he published a review in *PBSR* of the early to late medieval glazed wares in central Italy, and shortly afterwards was the first to propose a chronology for the medieval painted ware characteristic of central-southern Italy, allowing ninth-century types to be distinguished from late medieval examples.

In 1966 he was appointed Wainwright Fellow in Near Eastern Archaeology at the University of Oxford, where he remained until 1973. During that time he directed six seasons of excavation at the ancient Abbasid port at Siraf in the Persian Gulf, most of which was destroyed by an earthquake around 970. They were the first systematic excavations of an Islamic urban site, and among the most important undertaken on a major early centre in the eastern Islamic territories in the late twentieth century. He and his team uncovered not only well-preserved architecture, but a wealthy medieval entrepôt involved in a commerce that extended from the Middle East to China, India, southeast Asia, east Africa and the Red Sea. Subsequently he spent a year as Director of the British Institute of Afghan Studies (1973–4), before being appointed as Director of the British School at Rome, where he remained for ten years.

As Director of the BSR he extended his ceramic studies to the area of Lazio, with the publication of two major articles. The first of these (1978) provided a synthesis of the early medieval ceramics of Rome; and the second (1982), the first reliable early medieval and medieval ceramic typology for Latium, not only of the distinctive glazed Forum ware but also for the more common domestic wares. Equally important was his publication in the same period (1980) of the ceramics from Santa Cornelia, one of the two papal *domuscultae* or farming estates excavated by John Ward-Perkins following the South Etruria Survey. As with his previous work on Forum ware, these represented a major breakthrough, in particular for field survey. Thanks to Whitehouse's work from the 1960s onwards, for the first time it was possible to identify early medieval ceramic types and settlement of this elusive period rightly known at the time as the Dark Ages. His work on Latium remained the standard, in fact virtually the sole, guide, along with the work of Otto Mazzucato, to early medieval and medieval ceramics until the publication of the first results from the excavations of the Crypta Balbi in Rome in 1986.

His prodigious activity in this period included a series of excavations again aimed at investigating late antiquity and the beginnings of the Middle Ages, such as those of the late antique deposits at the Schola Praeconum in the Roman Forum; in Lazio, the tower house at Anguillara, the monastery of Farfa and the hilltop town of Nepi; and in the south, on the heel of Italy, the Roman and Byzantine port of Otranto. Whitehouse also excavated at a number of later medieval towns, such as Satriano, an Umbrian castle above Gubbio, and a rich town house at Tarquinia. Contemporarily, under the aegis of the BSR and the Directorship of David Whitehouse, other projects focusing on the late antique to early medieval period were developed by British scholars in Italy.

However, behind Whitehouse's numerous reports on his fieldwork and his ceramic studies, was a great intellectual capacity to see the 'big story'. As Richard Hodges has pointed out, this is seen best in Whitehouse's chapter on late antiquity and the commerce of the Abbasid caliphate in the book they co-authored, *Mohammed, Charlemagne and the Origins of Europe* (1983), which challenged the economic historical thesis of Henri Pirenne.

In 1984 he left Rome to join the Corning Museum of Glass in New York, first as Chief Curator, then as Deputy Director, and from 1992 to 2011 as its Director. He stood down from the post in 2011 to focus on his research, becoming the Museum's Senior Scholar. During this period he entered into a new field of studies, that of ancient, Islamic and medieval glass. His contribution to this field, as to that of Italian medieval archaeology, was enormous. Under his editorship, the *Journal of Glass Studies* became the standard international journal for the discipline. He also published a series of major catalogues of the Museum's unique glass collection and, as Executive Director, restructured the Museum. The flood of comments from his American colleagues following his premature death bears witness not only to his scholarship but also to the enormous affection he inspired.

I first came to the BSR as a *camerone* research assistant (then generally known as the *camerone* slave), in 1980, when David Whitehouse was still director. I was too inexperienced to appreciate fully the scholarship of the person I was working for and the importance of his research in Italy at that time — that only came later, when I continued with my studies of medieval pottery. However, it was thanks to his stimulating ideas and enthusiasm, and his ability to inspire those working with him, that I did continue, like many others who have followed his pioneering research initiatives. I remember his enthusiasm when he bounded into the *camerone* having found a virtually complete African red slip dish with a Christian symbol from the excavations at the abbey of Farfa, or when he discovered new evidence for the dating of the early medieval glazed ware, Forum ware. I also remember trips out, such as that with him and Barri Jones to Anguillara, flying a kite over the site with a camera attached (it crashed, but it was great fun to watch), and the occasional long and entertaining lunch. One recent episode described by Paul Roberts, a former BSR scholar and currently Senior Curator in the Department of Greece and Rome of the British Museum, gives some insight into David Whitehouse as both a scholar and person. Last year in Stowerbridge, one of the major centres of traditional glass production in Britain, at a presentation of a replica of the Portland vase made by the local industry, he was invited as the keynote speaker to talk about modern cameo glass production techniques, on which he had recently co-authored a major volume. He grew up in this area but it was the first time that the ‘local boy’, now a distinguished international scholar, had returned — he was treated as royalty, and the local press and TV were present. However, after his speech and having talked briefly to the press, David preferred to spend his time talking with the local craftsmen, the people who actually carried out the work. This ability to wear his knowledge lightly, and enjoy sharing and discussing his research, not only with other scholars but with people who were not specialists in the field, is one that distinguished David Whitehouse throughout his career.

HELEN L. PATTERSON