

Penelope Walton Rogers

1950–2023

Born on 11 October 1950 in Newcastle, Tyne and Wear, Penelope Walton never really left the north east of England as she suffered from agoraphobia from a young age. She, nevertheless, used this to her advantage and gained an international reputation as the doyenne of archaeological textiles in the UK following the death of her mentor, Elisabeth Crowfoot, in 2005. Her brilliance as a schoolgirl led to her gaining a place at Cambridge University but she chose instead to embark on a career in archaeology and became a Finds Officer with York Minster Archaeologists. Thereafter York became her base and the wealth of organic material being excavated in the city resulted in her turning her attention to textiles. In 1980 she set up *Textile Research* that subsequently became *Textile Research in Archaeology* and, in 2001, the *Anglo-Saxon Research Laboratory*.

Her stream of publications on textiles and textile-related tools started to appear in 1981 with 'The Textiles' in 'An Excavation in the Castle Ditch, Newcastle upon Tyne, 1974-6, *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 5th series, 9. However, Penelope was a trailblazer in multiple fields. She learnt to analyse fleece types, identify different animal and plant fibres and then also dyestuffs, collaborating in this latter work with George Taylor, a retired chemist, with whom she established the annual meeting of Dyes in History and Archaeology in 1982. Her ability to detect lichen dyes through absorption spectrophotometry was exceptional. In 1985 along with Gillian Eastwood, Penelope set up the *Archaeological Textiles Newsletter* (now the ATR) and remained on the editorial board until the end of 1992. She and Gillian also co-authored *A brief guide to the cataloguing of Archaeological Textiles*

(1985). Both have proved to be invaluable resources for the increasing numbers in this research field. She hosted the third NESAT in York in 1987 and edited the publication of the proceedings with John Peter Wild. Her skills meant that Penelope was in continuous demand, and she acted as a consultant to many institutions and archaeological units in twelve European countries as well as several continents. Her expertise covered all periods from the Neolithic to the nineteenth century and her reports produced with great efficiency and clarity featured in many important archaeological publications, not only in the UK but also in Europe and Canada. Major publications flowed

from her pen including a duo for *The Archaeology of York, Textiles, Cordage and Raw Fibre from 16-22 Coppergate* (1989) followed by *Textile Production at 16-22 Coppergate* (1997). She was second to none in her analysis of metal-replaced textiles that Anglo-Saxon cemeteries yielded in profusion and the research she undertook relating to this material culminated in the definitive monograph, *Cloth and Clothing in Anglo-Saxon England AD 450-700* (Council for British Archaeology, 2007)



Penelope Walton undertaking dye identification in the mid-1980s (Image: unknown, provided by Lise Bender Jørgensen)

and its accompanying online database. She never rested on her laurels and always sought new methods and approaches to textile research with her mathematical turn of mind enabling her to master statistics and Correspondence Analysis. She also embarked on archaeological management for English Heritage, local government units and commercial organisations ensuring projects were brought to a successful conclusion masterminding, 'Tyttel's Hall: The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Tittleshall, Norfolk',

East Anglian Archaeology 150 (2013), for example. A stalwart believer in the importance of women in academia, Penelope did her utmost to promote the study of archaeological textiles and she was generous with her knowledge and advice. She encouraged and taught post-graduate students attached to the University of Bradford and the University of York and was appointed an Honorary Visiting Fellow at the University of York. Exasperated by the long time it took to publish reports in conventional journals and also by a tendency for publications to overlook the contributions of some authors, she established the Pangur Press, which has enabled textile publications to reach a wider public.

In 1996 she was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. She was a longtime member of the Early Textiles Study Group (ETSG), serving as its Chair 2017-2022 and at the time of her death was still the web administrator.

After the death of her partner Ian Rogers, an illustrator, in 1990, Penelope took on his surname. She unexpectedly died on 10 November 2023 a few weeks after having a kidney operation.

*By Lise Bender Jørgensen
and Frances Pritchard*