



John Peter Wild

# Obituary, Bill Cooke (1943-2012)

The news that Dr W.D. (Bill) Cooke died on 10th August 2012 from a rare lung condition will come as a shock and severe blow to his many friends, colleagues and former pupils in the archaeological textile fraternity. Bill had created for himself over the past 25 years a special research niche: the characterisation and evaluation of archaeological textiles using the methodology of modern textile technology. In part, this arose from his own university department's long-established expertise and experience in the application of scanning electron microscopy to textile materials; but he extended it to the deployment of other technical apparatus, often one step back from the state-of-the-art, but superior to the latter in flexibility of use.

Bill's early career was in product management in the British textile industry, to which his PhD from the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology gave him entrée. In 1971 he returned to UMIST as Lecturer in Textiles, specialising in the teaching of knitting and knitted structures, but with a wider remit in the study of the properties and performance of textile fabrics.

By the late 1980s he began to look for a fresh research challenge, and came down the road to the University's Department of Archaeology to root me out and explore the new possibilities which textile archaeology might offer. A glance at the well-preserved Roman wool textiles from Vindolanda inspired the thought that one could apply tests and ask questions of archaeological fabrics as if they were modern ones – and get some exciting answers. So it proved to be.

Bill and I set up the Manchester Ancient Textile Unit in 1989, as a (then unique) inter-disciplinary venture linking UMIST's Textile Department and the University of Manchester's Archaeology Department. It was designed as a vehicle for post-graduate teaching and research, and a platform for the launch of major research projects. Bill had an amazing ability to write applications which opened funding purses. Thanks to him, the Leverhulme Trust financed a three-year investigation (1992-1995) of the Vindolanda textiles

employing two post-doctoral research fellows, Colin Cork and Lucy Lu: it opened up new perspectives – and shut down a few, too. Software programmes for image analysis were beginning to be developed, and Colin grasped the opportunities enthusiastically.

Thereafter Bill made some significant contributions to the Nordic Viking wool sails project, based at Roskilde, and was a regular performer at meetings of the North-European Symposium for Archaeological Textiles. A string of pithy ground-breaking papers flowed from all this research activity.

Alongside his archaeological interests Bill ran a series of spin-off projects connected with his work in modern textiles, not least in the growing field of textile design. Though he formally took early retirement a decade ago, he remained active in research and fertile of new ideas, always willing to offer advice and inspiration. He has left a gap that will be impossible to fill.

