

## X. Upcoming conferences

### The announcement of next year's personal-histories panel

You are invited to an informal, round-table-panel historical discussion of the transformations in theory and method which occurred during the late 1970s and early 1980s. The oral-historical panel is scheduled for Monday, October 22 2007, from 4.00 to 6.00pm, at the Cambridge University Biffen Lecture Theatre, Genetics Building, Downing Street Site, Cambridge University. A super homemade tea will be served beforehand at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology beginning at 3.00pm. A wine reception follows also at the Museum. A lovely formal dinner is then planned at St John's College.

Professor Henrietta Moore from LSE, Professor Meg Conkey and Professor Ruth Tringham from UC Berkeley, and Professor Alison Wylie from the University of Washington, will reconstruct their experiences, moving from the New Archaeology, opening and founding post-processual approaches.

There is no charge except for the dinner.

If you are interested in attending, please contact Pamela at [pjs1011@cam.ac.uk](mailto:pjs1011@cam.ac.uk)

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## XI. Necrology: Bruce Trigger

### A reflection on Bruce and Barbara Trigger based on oral-historical interviews and personal correspondence

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Bruce G. Trigger, a world-esteemed, multi-talented and many-faceted intellect, a great and brilliant archaeologist and historian, died on 1 December 2006 in Montreal leaving 'the world a smaller and saddened place'.<sup>1</sup> His wife, Barbara Welch, a lesser-known but equally sophisticated thinker, died of heart failure on 18 January 2007. 'They were a team',<sup>2</sup> observed Barbara's sister. Although obituaries and tributes seldom capture even a small part of the depth of a human life, the Triggers, indeed beloved and respected, are here briefly remembered.

Barbara Welch came up to Cambridge in 1958, pursuing her life-long fascination with volcanoes; 'she had a thing about islands',<sup>3</sup> commented fellow undergraduate geographer, Elizabeth Staley. Arriving just ten years after women were first awarded degrees by this august, ancient, all-male university,

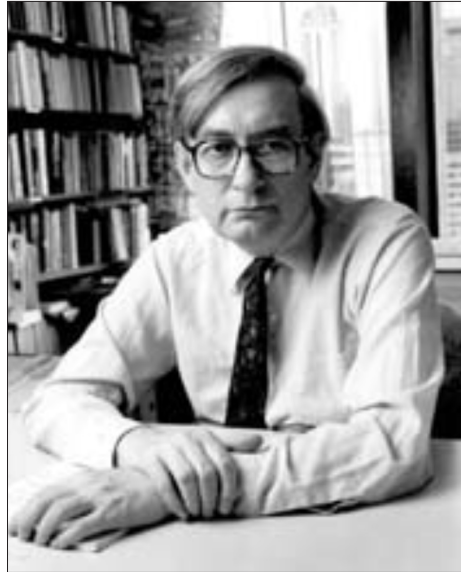
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<sup>1</sup> Ontario archaeologist, Marti Latta, correspondence, 17/04/07.

<sup>2</sup> Janet Welch, in conversation, 19/04/07.

<sup>3</sup> Fellow Cambridge undergraduate and geographer, Elizabeth Staley, in conversation, 13/04/07.

Bruce Trigger (1937–2006). Photo taken by Claudio Calligaris and published in the *McGill Reporter* of Thursday November 5 1998.



female numbers were still capped at 500 and women were still not yet allowed to be members of men's colleges. 'We stuck together [in classes] we were outnumbered . . . 10 to one!' Barbara remained indefatigable, described as the 'brainiest'<sup>4</sup> of an already highly-selected lot, she was a keen caver and an adventurous, entertaining cook who hung her cherished, ripe camembert outside the window, in her hockey boot,<sup>5</sup> so as to not offend her dinner guests.

In her postgraduate research, Barbara, writing with wit and insight, investigated the geomorphological development of Eastern Caribbean volcanic centres. By 1968, she broadened her concerns to include the human geography of Caribbean population density and emigration, and in 1996 published her detailed, cross-societal, methodologically innovative study of West Indian banana growers' associations and their role in the islanders' livelihood.

In 1968, when Barbara married Bruce, he was fast becoming the leading 'architect of Canadian archaeology'.<sup>6</sup> It is little known outside Canada that Bruce had a deep and profound influence on the development of archaeology in his homeland and is seen as one of the great Canadian intellectuals along with Harold Innis, Northrop Frye and Marshall McLuhan. It is often mentioned with pride that he rejected lucrative offers from prestigious American universities to remain at McGill University and train generations of Iroquoian specialists; top Canadian positions are sprinkled with former students.

'He had a very real impact on Canadians in terms of understanding the power of archaeological knowledge . . . teaching us to face the social responsibilities of our subject, making us aware all the time of whose history we were studying'.<sup>7</sup> Bruce supported the First Nations boycott of 'The Spirit Sings' exhibition at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary in 1988. 'This underlined my increasing awareness of the economic, social, and political problems facing indigenous peoples', he wrote (2006: 249) in his 'Retrospection'. After the publication of *The Children of Aataentsic: a History of the Huron*

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<sup>4</sup> Both quotes, Cambridge classmate, Janet Upward, correspondence, 17/04/07.

<sup>5</sup> Cambridge classmate, Patricia Peckham, in conversation, 29/04/07.

<sup>6</sup> Bruce's former Ph.D student, Eldon Yellowhorn, archaeologist and member of the Piikani Nation; Eldon is a pioneer of Internalist archaeology which is archaeology practiced of, by and for the First Nations peoples. In conversation, 20/04/07.

<sup>7</sup> Ron Williamson, former Trigger Ph.D student and Director of Archaeological Services Inc. a large, successful CRM firm in Ontario, in conversation, 25/04/07 and correspondence, 27, 29, and 30/04/07.

*People to 1660* (1976), two volumes which inserted Europeans squarely within the Huron's historical legacy, Trigger was adopted as an honorary member of the Great Turtle Clan of the Wendat Confederacy.

'The consummate academic', private, somewhat formal, always with 'a shirt and tie on',<sup>8</sup> his first PhD candidate, Robert Pearce remembers him as impeccably generous, judicious and fair. He was simply 'a totally decent human being', states Marti Latta.<sup>9</sup> As one of Bruce's last PhD candidates, Jay Cunningham found 'my weekly meetings with Bruce Trigger to be awe inspiring events', long animated discussions, interrupted spontaneously by Bruce jumping to grab an illustrating book from his vast personal library.<sup>10</sup> In my own experience, Bruce Trigger always went to the core of my career choices and with a few wise words, determined my direction, inspiring admiration and gratefulness.

Toward the end of his life, Bruce became increasingly concerned about the 'capitalist system [as] the most dynamic and ruthless transforming force in human history' (1995: 167). But unlike his mentor, Gordon Childe, he did not become disillusioned or despondent;<sup>11</sup> according to Stephen Chrisomalis, he remained hopeful that archaeological knowledge when combined with other disciplines could guide social planning in order to avoid doomsday scenarios. In one of his last e-mail messages to me, Bruce wrote, 'I have begun work on a small book addressed to the general reader in which I hope to vent my discontents with the modern world and its leaders and suggest . . . some viable alternatives seen from the perspective of an archaeologist'. This would have been a much-needed book.

Although Bruce remained calm about his own impending death, in conclusion, I may feel as Gilbert and Sullivan's lyric observes, 'That Death, whene'er he call, Must call too soon'.<sup>12</sup>

Sources for further study and references cited:

Those interested in accurate biographical details, lists of distinctions, publications and Trigger's graduate students' theses are referred to the thorough documentation and analyses presented in a festschrift (2006) edited by Trigger's colleagues, Ron Williamson and Mike Bisson. Numerous excellent obituaries exist. Perhaps the best, Norman Hammond's, appeared in *The Times* on 7/12/06. Two solid interviews (1995, 2006) and two autobiographical essays (1998, 2006) have been published. Historians will also be pleased to know that Bruce's remaining papers will be available through the McGill University Archives.

## References

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- Van Reybrouck, D. 1995. On a Creative Middle Ground between the Extremes: an Archaeological Dialogue with Bruce G. Trigger. *Archaeological Dialogues* 2 (2): 160–171.
- Welch, B. M. 1963. Volcanic Landforms in the Windward and Leeward Islands. *Geographical Articles* 2: 43–44.

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<sup>8</sup> Robert J. Pearce, correspondence, 16/04/07.

<sup>9</sup> Marti Latta, correspondence, 16/04/07.

<sup>10</sup> Jerimy J. Cunningham, correspondence, 16/04/07; in conversation, 19/04/07.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen Chrisomalis, former Trigger student and current McGill Lecturer who now has the honour of occupying Bruce's office, in conversation, 28/04/07; correspondence, 27/04/07.

<sup>12</sup> Many of us have delightful memories of the Triggers as faithful patrons of the McGill Savoy (Gilbert & Sullivan) Society. Colonel Fairfax from 'Yeomen of the Guard', quote suggested by George Cummings, current President of the McGill Savoy Society.

- 1968. Population Density and Emigration in Dominica. *The Geographical Journal* 134: 227–235.
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