

IN MEMORIAM JAY J. BUTLER

* *Philadelphia, USA*
April 9th, 1921

† *Haren, The Netherlands*
November 13th, 2014



Jay J. Butler with his ever-ready camera in 1972, on a BAI-excursion to Yugoslavia and Hungary. Photo: Willy H. Metz.

On November 13th, 2014, Bronze Age scholar Jay Jordan Butler passed away at the age of 93.

Long before universities actively employed the concept of ‘internationalisation’ in their research strategies, Jay embodied this concept at universities in London, Amsterdam and Groningen.

Jay was born in Philadelphia (‘Philly’), Pennsylvania, but grew up in New York state. From 1937 to 1940, he studied at the School of Business and Civic Administration of the City College of New York, with journalism as his main subject. During the Second World War he joined the military, and in the course of almost four years was stationed in England, Brittany, the Rhineland and, finally, Berlin, until 1946. Jay’s language skills resulted in him being appointed an interpreter in the Allied forces. After the war, he enrolled at Wyoming University to study history. His master’s thesis was devoted to agrarianism and early capitalism in 18th-century Georgia (submitted 1949, Butler 2011). In 1949, the year of his graduation, he returned to Europe to study archaeology at the Institute of Archeology in London. Jay was inspired by Vere Gordon Childe, director of that institute and professor of prehistoric archaeology. Childe introduced Jay to the Bronze Age and encouraged him to investigate the history of early trade and connections between the British Isles and northern Europe.

Several of Childe’s students, amongst them Jay Butler, Isobel Smith and John Alexander, crossed the North Sea in 1951 to visit the Netherlands. They were invited by Pieter Glazema, director of the then State Service for Archaeological Investigations (ROB, now RCE), to acquaint themselves with Dutch archaeology. In the course of five weeks they visited several museums and lent a helping hand at the excavations of Bronze Age barrows at Ermelo and Vessem.¹

In 1952, Jay started work on his PhD thesis. He received grants to travel around Europe and to perform research in Scandinavia as well (1953-1954). In these years, he studied many bronze artifacts in over 60 museums, including at least ten in the Netherlands. Jay became increasingly familiar with the Dutch Bronze-Age finds and archaeologists. Such contacts led to cross-Channel collaboration, of which Jay’s publication with Willem Glasbergen

on the Beaker-period finds from Bennekom (Butler & Glasbergen 1956) is an early example. In these years Glasbergen had recently defined the Hilversum Culture, explaining a number of new elements in the Bronze Age material culture in the south of the Netherlands by the arrival of British migrants.² His theory set English archaeologists thinking. Jay Butler and Isobel Smith were the first to respond (Butler & Smith 1956), supporting the need for a revision of the British Bronze Age.

Fortunately for Dutch archaeology, Jay’s UK residence permit could not be extended, and in 1956 he crossed the North Sea to Groningen. In 1957, he was (temporarily) appointed as a researcher and lecturer at the Biological-Archaeological Institute (BAI, now Groningen Institute of Archaeology) of Groningen University. In addition to teaching, he devoted his time to completing his PhD thesis ‘Relations between the British Isles and northern Europe in the Bronze Age’, which he submitted to the Institute of Archaeology, University of London in 1958 (published five years later as ‘Bronze Age Connections across the North Sea’; Butler 1963a). Achieving his PhD paved the way for part-time appointments at both the University of Amsterdam (from 1963 to 1986) and Groningen (from 1957 until his retirement in 1986). Jay’s retirement in no way meant a reduction of his scientific efforts: in 2001 his 80th birthday was marked not only by a massive *festschrift* (‘Patina’³), but also by the observation that his list of publications was still expanding on an almost yearly basis.⁴ His exceptional and continuing scientific devotion is evident from the fact that even after turning 90 he (co-)authored papers on his beloved bronze artefacts (Butler, Arnoldussen & Steegstra 2012; Butler, Theunissen & Van Os 2014).

Throughout his career, Jay’s work has focused on the inventory, accurate description and interpretation of bronze objects from the Low Countries (the

1 Theunissen, L., 2001: ‘Scheermessen, urnen en de Britse midden-bronstijd’, in: *Edelpatina*. 2 toespraken tot Jay J. Butler gehouden op 12 april 2001 ter gelegenheid van de overhandiging van Patina, 1-7.

2 Theunissen, L., 2009: British Immigrants killed abroad in the seventies. The rise and fall of a Dutch culture, in: P. Clarke (ed.), *Bronze Age Connections: Cultural Contact in Prehistoric Europe*, Oxford, 60-67.

3 W.H. Metz, B.L. van Beek & H. Steegstra (eds.), 2001, *Patina. Essays presented to Jay Jordan Butler on the occasion of his 80th birthday*, Groningen/Amsterdam (619 pages).

4 Reinders, H.R., 2001: Foreword in W.H. Metz, B.L. van Beek & H. Steegstra (eds.), *Patina. Essays presented to Jay Jordan Butler on the occasion of his 80th birthday*, Groningen/Amsterdam, 1-7.

Netherlands, Belgium and Luxemburg), France and the British Isles (UK and Ireland). Numerous research trips all over Europe allowed him to gain hands-on experience with a wide range of Bronze Age items – which also enabled him to identify supra-regional patterns of variation and linkage. Whereas most of his publications targeted a scientific audience, he was also keen to publish for a wider audience (*e.g.* Butler 1959a; 1961a;c; 1963c; 1965a; 1969; 1980; 1987b). Particularly his 1969 publication ‘Nederland in de Bronstijd’ (a volume in the ‘Fibula’ series), aimed at the general public, was a shining example of scientific knowledge made accessible to a wider readership and had a significant impact.

While Jay’s bibliography is full of important publications on often remarkable single finds and hoards from the Bronze Age, his more synthesizing articles constitute his most significant scientific legacy. Early examples include a paper on Dutch early metalworking (with Van der Waals) in 1966, and his paper on the evidence for local bronze production in 1973. Additionally, Jay also actively participated in, and contributed to, pan-European projects such as that on the Early Bronze Age ring- and rib-type ingots (Butler 1979) or the nature of European exchange networks like the *Nordische Kreis* (Butler 1986, see also Butler 1987a).

His retirement offered Jay the time and opportunity to compile key publications which have proved extremely valuable to the study of Dutch Bronze Age material culture: contributions to the corpus of

Dutch Bronze Age artifacts and hoards (*e.g.* Butler 1992; 1995/1996). Together with Hannie Steegstra, he managed to publish overviews of the Dutch winged (1999/2000) and socketed axes (2002/2003; 2003/2004; 2005/2006), which have formed indispensable frames of reference ever since. In 2007/2008 they published a discussion of the Late Bronze Age hoards from the Netherlands, with particular attention to the stories that the Bronze Age bracelets have to tell.

Sadly, his once excellent memory deserted Jay in the final years of his life, which ended the vivid storytelling and accurate archaeological identifications he was so renowned for. Nonetheless, through his publications he will continue to teach and inspire us “...from the verge of the oblivion from which there is no return...”⁵

S. Arnoldussen

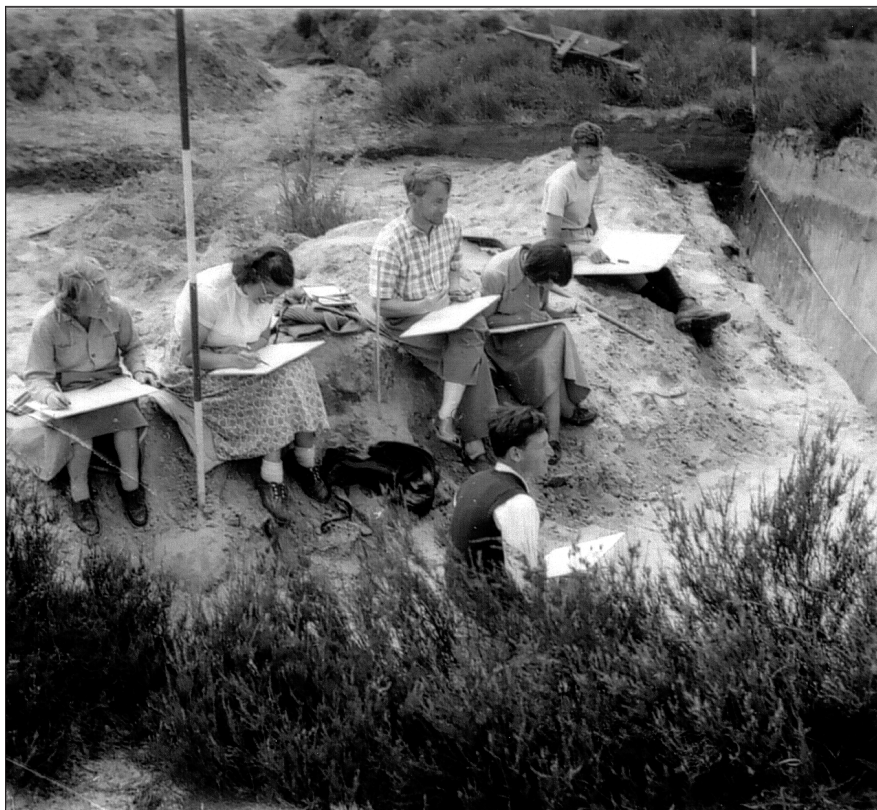
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&

E.M. Theunissen

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5 Hand-written note by J.J. Butler, written end of 2013.



Jay Butler (foreground) drawing a vertical section of a barrow on the Ermelo Heath in July 1952. In the background: Isobel Smith, Jean Butler, John and Mrs Alexander, Jan Albert Bakker. Photograph (by P.J.R. Modderman?) from the collection of dr. J.A. Bakker.



Jay Butler during the Dover Boat conference of 2002, holding a modern casted socketed axe. Photograph E.M. Theunissen.

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