

IN MEMORIAM WIL CASPARIE  
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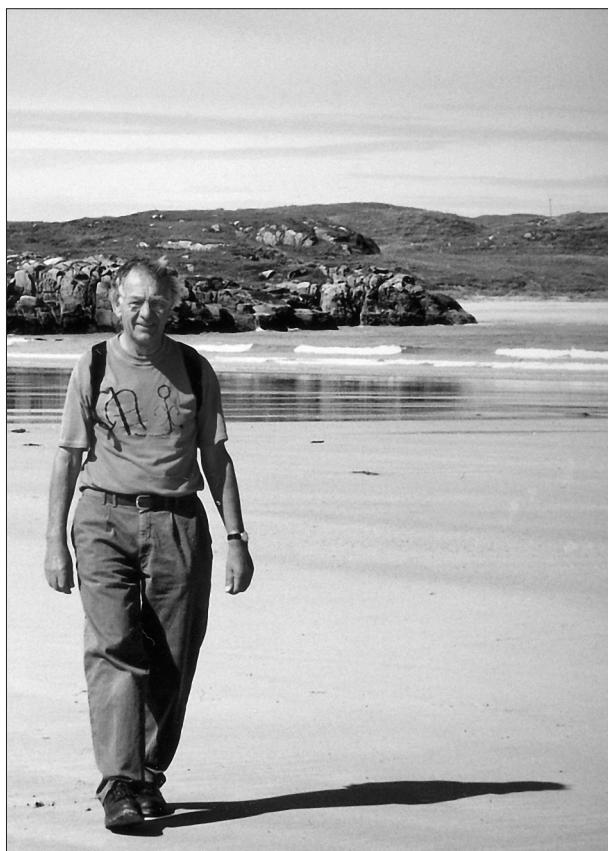
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Dr Willem Arnold (Wil) Casparie died peacefully at his home in Groningen on 7 August 2009, aged 79. His death marks the loss of an exceptional archaeologist who specialized in peat and wood studies.

Wil's work started with a brief period of teaching biology in Haren and Ter Apel. But his 50-year long career started for real in 1958 in the raised bogs of Southeast Drenthe, where he meticulously recorded every small detail of exposed peat profiles. His work also included microscopic studies of pollen, testate amoebae, macro-fossils and wood fragments. These recordings ultimately came together in his thesis in 1972. Later, archaeological remains from wooden structures brought a new dimension to his bog studies, starting with the trackway of Nieuw Dordrecht.

His attention to minute details remained when he became attached to the palaeobotanical department of the Biological Archaeological Institute (now Groningen Institute of Archaeology) in 1958. This department had three very impressive creative and productive individuals: Wim van Zeist, Sytze Bottema and Wil Casparie. All of them have made a huge impact on the archaeobotanical world both within and beyond Europe.

Wil worked on many sites in the Netherlands, amongst them Roman Velsen and Wijk bij Duurstede (Dorestad). The latest publication on Dorestad was brought by Wim

van Es to Wil shortly before he died. Wil also worked on sites in Germany (Wilhelmshaven and Oldenburg, via his personal contacts with Haio Zimmermann and Hajo Hayen), Switzerland (Niederwil), North Africa (Carthage), France, Italy (Satricum) and Ireland. Over time his publications became more readable and light-hearted. For example, Wil stimulated Dutch and Flemish colleagues to contribute papers to the popular-scientific magazine *Natuur & Techniek*. This was not yet common practice for archaeologists in the 1980s. His work included large-scale landscape studies but also small emotional gems such as the acrobat found in a Groninger cess pit, a *Steckengaukler* from Oberammergau.

Late in the 1960s it fell to the Dutch Forestry Commission (Staatsbosbeheer) to manage one of the last original raised bog remnant, Bargerveen in South-east Drenthe. Under the scientific guidance of Wil Casparie and Jan ter Hoeve (hydrologist with Staatsbosbeheer) small-scale experiments were undertaken to re-start raised bog development in the area. Later, in 1973, the Directorate of the County Council (College van Gedeputeerde Staten) decided to study the possibilities for a raised bog reserve. Wil Casparie formed part of the guiding team. One of the most important and crucial requirements for the stimulation of peat regrowth is the maintenance of the mineral underground water level at the base of the peat. This condition is still being implemented in raised bog remnants inside and outside of the Netherlands.

Wil had a natural flair for teaching and explaining things but this was not always possible during meetings and discussions. Therefore Wil wrote, together with Jan Streefkerk, the report ‘De hydrologie van Hoogveensystemen’ in 1987 (translated into English in 1989 as ‘The Hydrology of Raised Bog Systems’). This report is still being used by students today. The report has been very influential on the extensive research of raised bogs in Ireland (‘Conservation and restoration of Raised Bogs’, edited by M.G.C. Schouten, 2002), which – in turn – fed back again into Dutch research.

Besides his palaeobotanical work, Wil was also interested in people, society and processes. In his view, social relevance in archaeology had to be taken into consideration. As such he was an active member of and advisor to a number of organisations, such as Herinrichting Oost-Groningen, Stichting voor de Nederlandse Archeologie (SNA), Monument and Materiaal and the Drents Prehistoric Society.

He retired from the GIA in 1995, during his exhibition with accompanying catalogue on wood studies in the Groninger Museum. After this, his attentions were firmly turned towards the West.

Barry Raftery first invited Wil to come to Ireland with his wife Anneke in 1988, to visit and to give his opinion on the Mountdillon bog excavations in County Longford. Wil was amazed when he saw so many tracks and platforms and the excavation methods of the enthusiastic Irish archaeologists from the Irish Archaeological Wetland

Unit. It was love at first sight for Wil and Anneke. Barry and Nuala Raftery, along with John and Bryony Coles from England, formed a close friendship with them. Without any doubt, Wil had his finest hours in Ireland.

After the publication of the Mountdillon bog book in 1996, which Barry Raftery dedicated to Wil, Margaret Gowen asked Wil to help her with the large excavations in Derryville Bog, County Tipperary. This turned into a masterpiece, thanks again to Wil’s detailed approach. Since then, the word ‘bogburst’ has come alive as a reality in Irish palaeoenvironmental research. Wil and Anneke were loved by all, becoming effectively ‘parents’ to many archaeologists who year after year dug deeper and deeper into the bog. Anneke made sandwiches and tea while Wil followed the trenches and the stubborn augering of Bernie Owens – himself followed by admiring students. One of these, Nóra Birmingham, asked Wil to assist with the Tumbeagh Bog body study, another fine piece of research that has made it into publication.

Wil managed his administration and archive very carefully; all his notes were hand-written. Unfortunately, the pages relevant to the Late Mesolithic site at Bergschenhoek, for Leendert Louwe Kooijmans and Leo Verhart in Leiden, disappeared sometime in the 1970s. This was difficult to accept, as no copies had been made and all identifications of the wooden objects and fish weirs were lost except for a few pages with summaries. The identification of the fish weirs, dogwood *Cornus sanguinea* L., and the way the long rods were used, led Wil to suggest that Mesolithic people were involved in wood management. But it remained an unfinished chapter. Therefore, Wil was very pleased when Leendert Louwe Kooijmans approached him in 2008 to share the few available pages and his memories on the research with Welmoed Out towards her research. Wil was very happy with the resulting publication. That was a sound scientific article, he said, another chapter was closed.

His last publication focused once more on peat; a study on Bargerveen in South-east Drenthe published in August 2008. “This is my swan-song”, Wil said. The circle had been completed.

A year later, in July 2009, Wil was glad to hear of plans to re-install lectures on wood and charcoal in Groningen. This would be good for the profession, for the students, for the university and for Groningen city. He was very pleased to know that his work was acknowledged.

Wil knew he was ill since Easter 2008, yet he accepted his illness gracefully and without moaning. “I have had a good life” he said, and he was very happy with Anneke and his two daughters Carolien and Piedie. Anneke and Wil were married 50 years on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August, but he was already drifting away on clouds of love at that time.

Wil was a great teacher and loved to share his knowledge in a friendly, quiet, yet determined way. His students could draw on his knowledge of wood, peat, archaeology

and other matters (such as cowbells, orchids and train models). Without doubt he was one of the most important founders of raised bog studies and bog regeneration in the Netherlands. Wil shared his knowledge and inspiration gracefully to the very end and he left an impressive list of publications. We will miss him very much. Yet he is permanently in our hearts, and his scientific legacy is available for everyone. His footsteps in the bogs are now filled with moss but he has many friends who will continue his path.

Photo: Wil Casparie on Annagary Beach,  
County Donegal, Ireland (Photo A. Casparie)

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