

Digging up the secrets of the ancients can give new meaning to modern lives, as a band of adventurous Australians is discovering in Cyprus.

"Today I went out along the sea wall of the old city, a cloudy indigo pale morning, with touches of cerulean in the sky. A party of English birdwatchers with very complicated equipment was staring at the empty sea. The flock of sheep streamed past me, followed slowly by the shepherd in ancient clothes, his jacket moulded to him ..."

"Holly has started another trench, to try and discover the buildings beside the road ... A very strange feeling looking into the two complete Garden trenches, like binoculars into a literally buried and forgotten past ..."

*- from the Paphos diary, March-April 1996,
of artist and archaeologist
Diana Wood Conroy ▷*

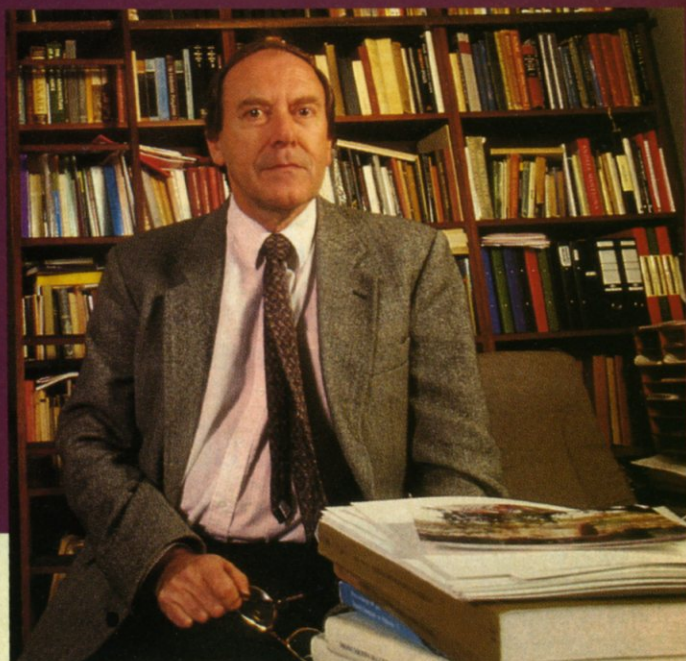
Statue of Athena, above, found at Paphos in trench 3B. Team members have excavated trench 1D to a depth of 5 metres, top.

Raising Aphrodite

Story by Nikki Barrowclough



Richard Green in his office at the University of Sydney; fragments of medieval pottery taken from the site, above; the two sides of a crusader coin found at the site, bottom – the team has unearthed relics from a range of civilisations.



It takes passion to be an archaeologist. There's no profit in it, and you're not allowed to keep the buried treasure. The echoes of the past are more important than the neuroses of the present. It seems safe to say there were no professional archaeologists at lunch last November at Catalina, the fashionable Sydney restaurant on the harbour at Rose Bay, where the only digging that goes on is between elbows.

One of the guests was the erstwhile comedian, Grahame Bond. He and his fellow lunchers were celebrating the Melbourne Cup – a scene far removed from the dust of an archaeological dig begun the previous year amid the wild flowers on an island in the eastern corner of the Mediterranean.

Still, fate worked its way between courses at Catalina.

Bond, who says he'd been feeling jaded for years, fell into conversation with a woman who'd been on an archaeological dig in Jordan. Imagination fired, he wrote off to the University of Sydney's Department of Archaeology and a few weeks later arrived for a meeting with the man who's now his mentor, Richard Green, professor of classical archaeology.

A few months later, Bond found himself with pick and shovel in Paphos, Cyprus – birthplace of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and beauty – digging up a 2,300-year-old Hellenistic theatre with Green and about 40 other Australians including Diana Wood Conroy, a lecturer in visual arts at the University of Wollongong's Faculty of Creative Arts, who would later write in her diary that the trenches were like "wounds, revealing the bony depths".

It was Green, renowned internationally for his investigations into the material evidence of ancient Greek theatre, who was invited by the Department of Antiquities in Cyprus to look into the remains of the Hellenistic theatre in Paphos.

A gentle, humorous man, who grew up in Manchester and studied the classics and archaeology at the University of London, Green's two most recent books, *Images of Greek Theatre* (London: British Press, 1995) and *Theatre in Ancient Greek Society* (London: Routledge, 1994) describe the physical and social ambience of the great eras of classical tragedy and comedy.

"I've been working on Greek theatre production for many years, and in particular I've been trying to work a new angle on it, as it were, by looking at the archaeological evidence for the way Greek theatre may have looked in performance.

It's parallel to that background that we're working on this theatre in Paphos,"

he explains in his famous "office" at the University of Sydney, a room crammed with hundreds of books and dozens of files, and more books balanced precariously in every remaining space.

Paphos was founded near

the end of the 4th century BC as the first capital of Cyprus and attracts two million tourists a year. It's now a world heritage-listed site – "rescued, as it were, from the teeth of the developers," says Green ruefully of the holiday apartments and hotels which have proliferated along the south coast of the island and are now creeping into Paphos itself.

"Almost at the last minute they were able to save part of the area, which is now a designated archaeological zone. And we've

been given what I regard as a plum site," Green adds.

A link between the University of Sydney and Cyprus has existed for years. Basil Hennessy, former professor of near-eastern archaeology, excavated there in the '50s and '60s, while his predecessor, Professor James Stewart, was in Cyprus in the immediate prewar and postwar years.

More recently, the Department of Antiquities in Cyprus has been trying to reduce archaeological activity on the island. Green, who began excavating in Paphos in 1995 with funding from an Australian Research Council grant, points out that three American expeditions were rejected by the Cypriots the same month he and his team were accepted. "We see this as a very real collaboration," he remarks. "It's not Australians in a sort of quasi-imperialist way, digging in an underdeveloped country."

"A windy dawn, with eucalyptus trees outside the hotel roaring. The village is so inconsequential, within the greater town of Paphos – winding streets with small buildings, and amongst them, ruins, and low Byzantine churches. It's hard to imagine what it must have looked like in antiquity, the surface of the earth has received such a battering.

The theatre we are excavating is on the edge of the hill called Fabrika, which is part of the open grassy space which must have once held all the old town of Paphos in antiquity ... The theatre is hardly perceptible in its full semicircular form, as the orchestra is buried under accumulated debris to the depth of two or three metres. A beautiful old terebinth tree grows in the middle of what

"I've learned that digging up the past, you become a sort of detective, finding out who murdered theatre. I always thought it was Andrew Lloyd Webber."





Grahame Bond, far left; Diana Wood Conroy, and below, fragment of a marble inscription listing victors at the ancient Paphos theatre festival.



Wollongong, and John Senczuk, who designed the set for the Sydney Theatre Company's controversial production of David Williamson's *Heretic*.

The exhibition aims to evoke the archaeological site in Paphos by re-creating the Hellenistic theatre using artefacts and other images created by Wood Conroy's group of fellow artists.

"The idea is to re-draw the plan of the theatre. It will be textured and layered, but it will be an illusion," she says. "People may walk across this installation and imagine both the formal structure of the Greek theatre and the intervention of archaeology." ▶

may have been the stage area, just coming into leaf. In all the pockets and crevices of the cut rock that formed the base of the seats, cyclamens are in flower ... Richard Green has a mad hope that what will be beneath the terebinth tree, or indeed in the garden of the old house now serving as accommodation for the diggers, will be the sanctuary of Aphrodite ..."

In his youth, Grahame Bond swore by a passionate existence. He studied architecture, and when Joern Utzon was infamously forced from the Sydney Opera House project in 1966, Bond, who was tutoring in design and architecture at the University of Sydney, resigned, along with 100 of his students, from the NSW Institute of Architecture.

In the '70s he created Auntie Jack, the outlandish television character who left an indelible impression on the Australian landscape. He also worked in the theatre, devising such productions as *Boys' Own Macbeth*. At other times, he followed a varied career in advertising and jingle-writing.

"I took lots of left-hand turns, and I'd lost the feeling of what passion was about," he says now.

Bond's letter to the University of Sydney's Department of Archaeology was perfectly timed. The department was in the throes of setting up a program using volunteers on university-led digs, an idea dreamed up by Dr John Tidmarsh, a Sydney endocrinologist who is also an archaeologist.

This year saw the first experiment with volunteers, who came in blocks of three weeks for a six-week season with Green and his students. One volunteer was a Sydney media director, another was a forensic science expert.

"They were looking for this imaginative connection with the past," comments Diana Wood Conroy. "That's why people come on archaeological digs. They're looking for a new relevance in their hurried lives."

Wood Conroy, a former student of Green's, is the curator as well as one of the artists putting together an exhibition of the Paphos excavation, *Images, Vestiges, Shadows: Paphos Theatre Installation*, a collaboration between the University of Sydney and University of Wollongong's Faculty of Creative Arts. (The exhibition is on at Sydney University's Maclaurin Hall this Wednesday, October 2. Its opening at 7.30 pm will follow a lecture at 6 pm by Richard Green, in the General Lecture Theatre in the main quadrangle.)

Bond is Wood Conroy's artistic consultant, working with Dr John McGrath, senior lecturer in theatre at the University of

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Digging in: the University of Sydney's team at work under a terebinth tree at the site, below; postgraduate student and assistant director of the expedition Andrea Rowe, right; a wild Persian cyclamen at the site, bottom.



The Paphos theatre dates from 320 BC and survived until the period of Late Antiquity, around 500 AD, a point not lost on Bond, who observes, "You know, in 50 years in Sydney, I've seen every major historical theatre torn down, one in the middle of the night."

The theatre was subsequently used as a quarry for building stone, and later, under the Romans, for staging gladiatorial spectacles. Three levels of waterproof cement on the floor of the orchestra section suggest the Romans also indulged in water sports.

"For me, the excavation is like unveiling a mystery," Bond adds. "You think, 'Why would the Romans have done that?' One of the great lessons I've learned about digging up the past is that you become a sort of detective, finding out who murdered theatre. I always thought it was Andrew Lloyd Webber."

Green and his team excavated this year from mid-March until the end of April, as they will again next year. The semicircular theatre is at least 50 metres across, and so far, less than a quarter has been exposed.

"We can't afford workmen; indeed, most excavations can't afford workmen," Green comments. "So the team members do all the hard labour: wheeling the barrows, digging, the shifting of stone. You can't move very fast, particularly if you're trying to do a careful job."

"The finds are very interesting: yesterday a bit of terracotta figurine, possibly Roman, of a dog, and part of a large marble vessel, claw-chiselled. I love the tiny tesserae from mosaics and the jewels of glazed earthenware from late Roman to medieval – almost a thousand years ... And today a small bronze figurine of Athena turned up in the garden trench ..."

"The paradox of archaeology is that a site that is excavated to be read, deciphered, to inform and extend historical knowledge is destroyed by the process of excavation. The dig is an unrepeatable experiment, almost a theatrical event. As the site is observed and excavated, it is destroyed," Wood Conroy wrote in *Archaeologies: Structures of Time* the catalogue accompanying her 1995 exhibition of tapestries and drawings with American weaver Sharon Marcus.

Green, asked about his feelings when on a dig such as Paphos, replies, "It sounds a bit over-the-top – there is, of course, the excitement of discovery – but it really comes back to the sort of issue I was talking about before, about the role of theatre in ancient life and the way we're saying something about the underpinnings of ancient society."

Later, he comments, "It may be rather old-fashioned, but important as our links are with Asia, the Australian tradition still grows out of the European tradition, and I still feel that part of Australia's importance in Asia is that it has what you could call a Western culture."

"I think people's attitudes towards the classical world are changing steadily, given that comparatively few people have the

chance to learn Greek and Latin these days," he adds. "They have to get to it from different ways, and archaeology and ancient art is a very good and direct way to do it."

Bond, who says he rediscovered his sense of passion in Paphos, plans to return for a repeat experience next year. Green, in a separate conversation, talks of the addictiveness of archaeological digs.

"It can be very dangerous in a way, very seductive," he says. "You can fall in

love with the whole excavation game, and for the director it can be a power trip: for us, they closed the road that runs alongside the Paphos site. The very excitement of the excavation could be sufficient in itself but one has a very real responsibility to publish the results. One is conscious that museum basements are jam-packed with unpublished material."

The Cypriots plan to use the theatre once the Australians have finally laid it bare.

Green will, of course, attend the first performance?

"I think we are the first performers," he replies enigmatically.

"There have already been some theatrical events," Wood Conroy murmurs. The two look at each other and chuckle, but like good archaeologists, they keep the secrets of the dig. □

Volunteers make a donation to the excavation and pay their fares, with hotel accommodation provided free. Next year they'll be asked to pay \$2,300 plus their (discounted) airfares. Those interested should phone the University of Sydney's Department of Archaeology (02) 9351 2759, or write to Professor Green. On the Internet, the Paphos Excavation Home Page can be found at <http://felix.antiquity.arts.su.edu.au/~robinson/>

SIMON CASHMAN, MARGARET CLUNIES ROSS