THE REMARKABLE MULTI-PERIOD FINDS AT MINNIS BAY, BIRCHINGTON: THE MAJOR CONTRIBUTION TO INTER-TIDAL ZONE ARCHAEOLOGY MADE BY ANTOINETTE POWELL-COTTON (1913-1997)

VERA AND TREVOR GIBBONS

Minnis Bay, located midway between the Roman Fort of Reculver and Margate, is the most westerly bay on the north coast of the Isle of Thanet. The original inlet and its associated navigable creek were protected by the 30ft cliff headland to the east. This natural habitat has been occupied since at least the Neolithic period with indications of a thriving Medieval occupation.

The significant Bronze Age site was on the east bank of the creek, now isolated at high tide 200m off-shore. The location is easily identified by the remains of the Hero shipwrecked in the late 19th century.

Quex Park, Antoinette Powell-Cotton’s family home in Birchington, is 2 miles south of the Bay.

Whilst some aspects of the archaeology of Minnis Bay, Birchington have been published over the years, no comprehensive overview has ever been undertaken. This article aims to address this by giving recognition to the key players who found, excavated and recorded the area, which Christopher Hawkes recognised as an important site following a visit in 1939. He encouraged the continuation of the research in 1939 and also after the War in the 1950s.

Special attention will be given to the archaeological work of Antoinette Powell-Cotton, the youngest of three daughters of Major Percy Powell-Cotton of Quex Park, Birchington (1866-1940). He was a member of the Council of the Kent Archaeological Society from December 1914 until his death in 1940. In 1896 he built the first gallery of a museum at Quex Park to house his collection of Asian and African natural history and ethnography, the product of many expeditions. The Powell-Cotton Museum (hereafter the PCM), now has eight galleries and is of international importance. Archaeology was a longstanding interest within the family. The Major’s grandfather, Henry Perry Cotton was one of the founding members of the KAS in 1858. Significant finds were made on Quex Park land – a hoard of ‘Potin’ coins in 1853 and a bronze hoard in 1904. Only a few months before his death the Major was involved in the examination of the early church site at Woodchurch.

Antoinette Powell-Cotton found and recorded the greater part of what is so far known of the archaeology of Minnis Bay. She discovered evidence of human activity
Fig. 1 Location map of the Minnis Bay sites.
THE REMARKABLE MULTI-PERIOD FINDS AT MINNIS BAY, BIRCHINGTON

from the Neolithic to Medieval times. The present writers were privileged to work with her from 1965-1975. Now, as volunteers at the PCM, where Antoinette’s finds and the archives relating to Minnis Bay are held, they continue the work begun 50 years ago.

The cliffs between Minnis Bay and Grenham Bay once extended at least a further quarter of a mile out to sea and were bounded on the west by a creek, which extended southwards inland, as far as Upper Gore End Farm (Fig. 1). This creek provided shelter for shipping. In medieval times there existed a port here, sometimes known as ‘Goresend’, which was recognized as a limb of Dover, one of the head Cinque Ports. To the west of the creek was an extensive area of low lying marshy ground extending westward to Reculver and the Roman fort on the western bank of the Wantsum Channel. Over time the coastline was eroded away and the creek silted up thus causing the decline of the port but there is evidence that it was still possible to anchor there in the 1650s. Today, however, only a chalk platform and traces of the creek can be seen on the foreshore.

The greater part of the archaeological site lies on the foreshore at the eastern end of Minnis Bay and could only be found and excavated at low tide, parts of it being under 2m of water at high tide with some areas only being exposed during very low Spring Tides. This gave a limited length of time, four hours at most, when work could be carried out. The remaining part of the site was located on the cliff top immediately above the chalk foreshore with some of the pits very close to the cliff edge.

The Beginning of the Excavations

The first significant indication of early human activity at Minnis Bay was found in April 1938 when Percy Powell-Cotton was informed that a millstone (Fig. 2),

![Millstone in Well (1938)](image-url)

Fig. 2 Millstone in Well (1938).
covering what appeared to be a small pit containing pottery sherds, had been found by G.J.D’A. Beck (known as Jimmy), a 14 year old schoolboy from the King’s School, Canterbury, during a school holiday. Percy Powell-Cotton wrote in his diary the next day 15th April that he with his wife Hannah, Antoinette and his son Christopher:

went down to the Bay and out on the shore to the hole with a stone cover revealing bones and broken pots. We then went to Major Beck’s house on the Bay where we saw other bits collected by Beck. We all returned to the shore, bailed out the hole & collected more sherds.

A survey plan of Beck’s first pits was also drawn up (Fig. 3). Thus started the series of archaeological investigations on the Bay that continued until 1983 (with a break during the 1939-1945 war).

At the age of 25 Antoinette did her first excavating on the foreshore at Minnis Bay by helping Jimmy Beck to excavate some of the further seven pits found by him. The finds, from each of the pits/shaft bases, identified at that time as being of the Late Iron Age, are housed at the PCM including a New Forest type two-handled Scarborough Ware amphora in good condition excavated by Antoinette.

The Bronze Age Site

In the August of the same year, young Beck, becoming bored with the Late Iron Age...
Age pits, wandered further west along the beach where he found a pit or hollow near the remains of the *Hero*, shipwrecked in 1895. It contained a large quantity of animal bones and one human bone. He was about to give up when he came across a small piece of a bronze knife. This encouraged him to dig further and he found a bronze celt soon followed by more examples together with palstaves, dagger points, bracelets, swords, bronze tools, a bone arrowhead and a quantity of pottery sherds. Also found on the site was a large amount of wood, all well preserved in the clay filling of the pit. The wood included collapsed wattle ‘panelling’ and posts arranged in a curve and other individual posts. Percy Powell-Cotton was asked for help and, recognizing the importance of the hoard, he brought it to the attention of the British Museum (*Fig. 4*). Meanwhile Beck wrote an article on his latest find for his school magazine (Beck 1938).

Frederick Henry Worsfold, a local historian, became aware of the discovery of this significant bronze hoard. In March 1939 he approached the British Museum and invited Christopher Hawkes, then an Assistant Keeper, down to Minnis Bay to assess the site. Hawkes immediately realized the BM would be unable to mount a formal dig, as excavation was always dependent on the tides and weather conditions to expose the site. He suggested to Worsfold that, being local to the area, he should try to gather a team together, consisting of young Beck and his
friend Robert Grace, F.B. Byrom and Roy Carr, both amateur archaeologists, and other volunteers to work when the conditions were favourable. Hawkes gave his support by offering to put Worsfold in touch with any experts that were required to analyse their findings. He also agreed to make observations on any report that Worsfold may write.

To allow the Bronze Age site to be accurately located together with the eight Late Iron Age pits, a datum line was laid by Roy Carr and Byrom in May 1939. The line was taken from a groin beacon to the west and a mast stump of the wreck Hero on the east bank of the creek. These locations still exist today.

Sadly, in late 1939 Jimmy Beck became seriously ill and died in early 1940, to be followed only months later by Major Powell-Cotton. Hawkes felt Jimmy’s death was a great loss to archaeology. Before his death, Percy Powell-Cotton together with G.F. Pinfold, Curator of the PCM, recorded and photographed both the finds from the eight Late Iron Age pits and the Bronze Hoard and prepared a report (Powell-Cotton and Pinfold 1940). The hoard became known as the Beck Bronze Hoard or ‘Beck Find’. The hoard was given on loan to the BM for exhibition and eventually in 1961 it was gifted to it by Jimmy’s aunt.

After Beck’s death Worsfold and his team continued, when conditions allowed, to work on the site but stopped in early 1940 when no more archaeological work could be done due to war restrictions.

Worsfold wrote a 70-page report with copious photographs and excellent drawings and plans done by Byrom. He appended three reports, one by Dr J.W. Jackson on the animal and human remains, the second on plant remains by Miss A.P. Conolly of the Botany School, Cambridge, and lastly a report on the silt of Minnis Bay by Dr W.A. Macfadyen. Worsfold sent the report to Hawkes for his observations and received back a critique. This gives a different interpretation from that proposed by Worsfold. Specifically, Hawkes considered that the site section indicated two separate Bronze Age occupations, both abandoned due to flooding. An abridged report, mainly due to the shortage of paper during the War, incorporating some of Hawkes’ observations, was eventually printed (PPS 1943). The original report, including the letters between Hawkes and Worsfold and the drawings and photographs are in the archives of the Maidstone Museum, as the ‘Worsfold Papers’. Worsfold died in 1954.

A Report in The Times

In 1947, after a very severe storm, a fall of chalk exposed a shaft in the cliff face at Minnis Bay. This shaft was excavated by Major Burchell, Roy Carr the finder, and Molly his wife. They found another shaft further inland and, cut into the chalk on the cliff top nearby, two interconnecting hollows. The first shaft was 32ft deep with footholds cut into the sides of the upper 21ft. The filling contained a few pieces of Romano-British pottery and the bones of an ox and a horse. A roughly circular piece of sandstone partially blocked the shaft at about 27ft down. Amongst the finds at the base of the shaft were several hundred unopened oyster shells, suggesting at the time that the shaft might have been used for ritual purposes. A study on ritual shafts and wells by Dr Anne Ross (1968) expands on this. The Romano-British material recovered from this shaft together with photographs and
Burchell’s notes are all at the BM. A report on this find was published in *The Times* (31/05/1949) (Fig. 5).

Another excavation took place in 1947 on the foreshore at Minnis Bay of a
Medieval well which was also carried out by Carr (Fig. 6). This was a well lined with chalk blocks and containing a wooden spoon, metal needle, hay rake, bucket hoop, pegs, leather and a rim sherd. All the finds were given to the PCM in 1961. [This well was revisited in 1955, PCM reference Med6].

Antoinette Powell-Cotton the Archaeologist

Meanwhile the War had also stopped Antoinette continuing with the excavation of the Late Iron Age pits. She spent the War in London, working throughout the Blitz first as a volunteer at a First Aid Centre and later as a trained nurse and midwife. Antoinette continued to work in London until the early 1950s, when she returned permanently to Quex Park.

When time allowed Antoinette renewed her interest in archaeology. She helped at the archaeological sites at Richborough and Reculver but excavating at Minnis Bay quickly became her priority. No scrap of information was left unrecorded. Antoinette had become adept at compiling museum records when she worked as a volunteer for two years at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford in 1933-34. She had gained further practice of record keeping when she went with her father on a collecting trip to Zululand and on two trips with her eldest sister Diana in 1936 and 1937 to Angola making an ethnographic study of the local people.

Antoinette started her Minnis Bay field books in December 1953. She kept notes of all her excavations and research in 25 books finishing in 1983. (Now held in the
archives of the PCM.) During this time Antoinette found and excavated over 100 pits. She soon developed a procedure to deal with the difficult conditions in which she worked on the foreshore. In a long letter to Ann Conolly, who analysed soil samples for her, she explained the situation:

The tide washes over the site and fills any hole already dug taking in with it any weed, sand and no doubt any modern flotsam and jetsam. The first job is to take out any chalk [blocks], we fill in with and bail out; next to sponge dry all round where we kneel, down the sides of the hole and then the bottom, lastly to scrape away the muddy surface of the sides and bottom. These little specimens of silt were taken with care, cut out with a clean, sea rinsed trowel, with the water well controlled. In some cases where the soil broke up a piece would be lifted out. Sometimes we leave bones to collect another time or when dealing with pottery. A certain amount of water does trickle or ooze in, always gloves and tools get very muddied up. A piece of timber from one hole already dug will act as a conductor, bringing water from it into the new hole in process of being dug. However this can usually be kept under control with sponges or bailing the neighbouring holes. There may be fissures in the chalk, which if it is scraped too close on sides or bottom, may suddenly let in a gush of water or more likely just ooze. Sandy layers exposed in the side will ooze too but can often be plastered over with clayey silt quite successfully. The filling of the pit we smear around, [the top], to act as a dam and from it pieces of botanical material and doubtless seeds will be washed out by the tide and float about some of it to be re-deposited in our holes. If there is much rain the pit will also be awash with rain drained from the road. There are many drains in the promenade for this purpose and the road comes down the hill towards the shore. The shore water draining from there out to sea passes over the pit.

Over time Antoinette refined these techniques. At the end of each session of digging the pit had to be backfilled so as not to present a hazard to the public. For this Antoinette used the loose blocks of chalk that were scattered over the chalk foreshore. Gathering these blocks and taking them out of the excavation at the next session shortened the length of time available for continuing the excavation. Once digging could begin the excavated filling from the pit would be spread as a bank round the edge of the pit. Fragile finds, left for retrieval another day, would be packed up with sponges before the chalk blocks were carefully placed back on top. Under the last layer of chalk she spread scrupulously scrubbed strong blue plastic waste sacks. These sacks greatly reduced the amount of newly deposited seaweed and sand that had to be removed before further excavation could take place.

All of Antoinette’s finds were taken back to the PCM to be cleaned, labelled and recorded in the Museum’s catalogue system. Photographs taken by her and her helpers were carefully labelled. Experts were consulted and their findings noted in her field books.

Effects of Cliff Erosion and a Sea Defence Promenade

In the winter of 1953-4 further cliff falls revealed more cliff top pits and Antoinette spotted bones sticking out of the cliff face. She pulled out one of these bones and identified it as human. With official permission, Antoinette excavated 23 pits on the cliff top between 1954 and 1962 helped by Lester Barton, the PCM’s curator (Fig. 7).
The conditions of working on the cliff top brought different challenges from those on the shore. Sand could be thrown up by the high winds, which irritated the eyes. Antoinette found that working with her back to the wind alleviated the problem to some extent, but the position of some of the pits meant that she had to face the wrong way. Soon goggles became a useful addition to her tool kit. Some of the pits were right at the edge of the cliff and at times a rope harness was needed for safety. The Council’s work on the cliff top (to improve public safety) would eventually lead to the destruction of many of the pits, although when the machines were not in use they were excellent anchor points for her safety rope!

The cliff top pits yielded fragments of pot, bone and wood which were dated as Late Iron Age /early Roman. The most significant find was a contracted female inhumation in the filling of a ditch right by the cliff face. Using the regression formula of Trotter and Gleser (1958) Antoinette calculated the height of this person to be 4ft 11½ in. The find drew the attention of the local press and was reported in the *Kent Messenger* (13 March 1959), complete with a photograph showing Antoinette tied to her lifeline whilst she excavated. Fragments of two more human skulls were found, a large femur of a tall well-built individual, a worn tibia, and a large scapula all possibly belonging to the same male. In all Antoinette excavated 43 pits on the cliff top – five were of little or no significance and all bar six were
destroyed in the cutting back of the dangerous cliff face before the construction of the sea defence promenade.

Concurrently with excavating the cliff top pits Antoinette was working on the foreshore, concerned that the promenade construction work would destroy the archaeological site. She re-opened Jimmy Beck’s first eight pits and cleaned them out thoroughly so that they could be properly surveyed. In 1957 she also revisited the Bronze Age site excavated by the ‘Worsfold team’ during 1939-40. Antoinette re-opened the pits and retrieved further finds missed in the original excavation. The bronze pieces she sent to the BM to be held with the original bronze hoard. Amongst the sherds kept at the PCM were many pieces of briquetage, recently analysed as showing that salt-making processes were carried out here. These pieces of briquetage, date to c.1000-700 BC.

This was not the last time that this site was visited. In late 1966 when a storm scoured the sand and seaweed from the Bronze Age site, Antoinette re-surveyed the area with the present writers’ help. It was not until 1971 that the present writers redrew the original survey done by Byrom in 1939 to the same scale as the 1966 survey. The two drawings were overlaid and Antoinette remarked in Field Book 23, p. 23:

All his [Byrom’s] pits and particularly pit 15 were represented as very much larger than I believe to be the case at any rate today – allow for erosion and possibly masking by sand encroachment or the possibility of the pits (filling) covered by later flood deposits.

One problem that Antoinette encountered when working on her own was how to locate the pits as she had nobody to hold the other end of the tape. Her Field Books contain small sketches giving the distances between pits measured in Ps (paces), a technique she had encountered on her trips to Angola. Whilst this method was sufficient for her own use it was necessary for her to get a more accurate survey. In 1957 she approached the Isle of Thanet Geographical Society and they were only too happy to undertake the task. As each new pit was found it was added to the map and from 1966 the present writers (being architects with drawing skills) were able to assist in this. Members of the Society were also very helpful in explaining the geology of the area.

Volunteers

Antoinette often found herself working alone as most of her volunteers were only available at weekends or during holidays. On one occasion, when conditions on the Bay were very good, she recorded in her field book that all of her current helpers were victims of the then current flu’ epidemic. Antoinette was totally reliant on volunteers to progress the excavation and especially those with skills in surveying and drawing. At the beginning of each Field Book entry Antoinette listed all the volunteers who were with her that day or whether she was alone. Some of the volunteers were friends but many were people who were just curious as to why she was digging holes in the Bay. When they enquired as to what she was doing her reply was often that she was digging for rubbish. If they asked further they may have found themselves helping. Families were often seen working with her
and some of the children were rewarded with fossils that Antoinette found when beachcombing. Some of the curious offered their help in other ways, such as her dentist who X-rayed some of her finds and two flying instructors from Manston aerodrome, who flew over Minnis Bay as part of their training flights, took aerial photographs and gave copies to Antoinette for her records.

In 1958 the difficulty of finding help when conditions were good prompted Antoinette to question as to whether she should continue to work on the Bay. She contacted Hawkes, now at Oxford, for advice. His reply (actually drafted by his assistant):

I am sure that it would be the best possible plan if you would undertake to continue operations on the Minnis Bay site. As you say it does require a thorough knowledge of local conditions on the beach as it seems the best opportunities of working there could only be exploited by someone near at hand to take advantage of them. Luckily, too, I expect you to be able to use a corner of your own museum for keeping your finds in their associated groups and I hope that you will be able to extend the plan you showed us. If any of the pits or hollows display a definite shape it might be worthwhile drawing a section across them, as well as planning their outline.

If you feel you do need advice as you go along, I suggest you approach the British Museum (it is better to call them than write if you cannot get up to London), since they already hold part of the material that the site has already produced. They will seem more accessible to you than we are here. But once you have accumulated as much material as you can usefully collect, perhaps you would get in touch with Prof. Hawkes again – I am sure he will be interested in the results you obtain, and will gladly advise you about the publication of them.

At the time of this letter Antoinette had already located and explored many pits. 17 pits were on the cliff top and of the Late Iron Age/early Roman period. 16 pits were between Minnis Bay and Grenham Bay on the chalk foreshore, of which 14 pits, including the original eight pits found in 1938, were re-excavated by her for survey purposes. All were attributed to the Late Iron Age/Roman period. One pit had been previously dug by persons unknown and was empty. Along the line of what would have been the banks of the creek, Antoinette had found 26 Medieval pits, six Early Iron Age pits and 20 other sites of various ages including Neolithic and the late Bronze Age.

The discovery of the shaft in the cliff face in 1947 and the roughly circular shape of some of the Late Iron Age pits found on the chalk foreshore led Antoinette to believe that these pits were originally cliff top wells that had become contaminated and were therefore used as a depository for rubbish. Antoinette went on to find another 14 pits in the chalk foreshore, some of which had freshwater leaking into them. Seven of these were of the Late Iron Age, five were further modern animal burial pits and no finds were found in the remaining two.

Well 30, a Late Iron Age Shaft Base

In 1965 Antoinette found ‘Well 30’ the last in her sequence of Late Iron Age pits on the foreshore. At first, at the beginning of April, she suspected this might be a new pit. She checked it again at the end of the month. It was verified on the 29th of the month and estimated to be only 4in. deep, the base being of a very dry, tough
and compacted material. It was not until a year later that Antoinette, helped by the present writers, decided to try to break through this compacted layer with a pick. This exposed what proved to be a 2,000 year-old time capsule, the contents of which had been fully preserved by the bottom sludge of the original well, a very smelly filling (Figs 8-11).

Fig. 8 Well 30. (A.P.C./T.G. 1966.)

Fig. 9 Well 30 Pot 1.
Plan: Shaft [well] 30

Minnis Bay, Birchington
surveyed 1966

Fig. 10 1966 Measured plan drawing of Well 30. (V. and T.G.)
Sections: Shaft (well) 30

Fig. 11 1966 Measured section drawing of Well 30. (V. and T.G.)
At about 14in. down, sherds of grey-brown grog were found allowing a rim to base pot profile. This pot had been mended in antiquity with a pitch like substance and holes drilled on either side of the break (Thompson 1966). As the excavation continued the significant remains of a further seven pots were found, together with a complete safety pin brooch/fibula, an iron fragment of another, the base and a small section of stave from a bucket, a length of withy rope with a possible indication of a wooden handle. Food bones from domestic animals, the skeleton of a dog, oysters, one cockle, beetle remains and flint waste from knapping were also found.

Antoinette decided to write up Well 30 as a representative example of this group of pits and asked the present writers to collaborate with her in compiling the information and doing the necessary artwork. A draft report was produced but never published. In 2014, on return to Quex Park, the present writers were able to digitally complete the report and a copy can be seen in Gallery 4 of the Museum alongside a display of the rebuilt pots and some of the other finds from Well 30. The other Late Iron Age pits yielded pieces of leather footwear in pits 14 and 15, various pieces of quern stones, pieces of worked timber, pottery sherds, flint, bones and shells.

Antoinette always tried to follow the then accepted practices of archaeological excavation. From her experiences at Richborough and Reculver she was very aware of the importance of making vertical sections down through the fill of each pit. The waterlogged nature of the fill made it difficult to measure precisely the depth of each different layer of fill. Sections were also difficult to achieve in the confined bases of the shafts on the chalk foreshore once the excavation was down a metre below seabed level.

Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age Pits

By 1972 Antoinette had located and excavated 22 pits to the south-east of the Bronze Age site along the east bank of the original creek. This series of pits, to distinguish them from the Late Iron Age ‘Wells’ and Bronze Age pits, were lettered alphabetically as they were considered to belong to a different period. (Albeit adjacent to the Late Bronze Age site of Worsfold’s report.) These became known as the ‘lettered pits’ and were estimated as being of the Early Iron Age. Some of these pits covered large areas on the east bank of the Creek and had to be excavated as a series of cells due to the limited length of time that each pit could remain open between tides. Among the more unusual finds were a horse pelvis packed with human bones and flints with several human bones scattered about; part of a cranium was in one of the cells of Pit S. Pit U yielded part of a unique Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age ladder leaning upright against the side of the pit (Fig. 12) together with other wooden stakes and pot sherds. A gold earring found near the same pit and four glass beads in one of the cells of Pit X were estimated to be 1st-century AD.

Signs of a Substantial Medieval Occupancy

Between 1954 and 1974 the largest group of pits excavated were those of the Medieval period, pits Med 1 to Med 41. These were distributed between the east
Fig. 12 Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age ladder from Pit 'U'.
and west banks of the creek to the south of the Early Iron Age pits. There were no artefacts in three of these pits and Med 22 only contained plant material. Med 1 was a shallow depression on the east bank of the creek measuring 2ft 0in. by 4ft 0in. across. It contained sherds sufficient to reconstruct a jug with a pie crust base, other pottery sherds, some leather and wood (Fig. 13).

In Med 35 a huge bone, presumably from a whale and scrap of leather were found. Med 39 excavated in 1970 contained jugs (Fig. 14), other sherds and several pieces of wood. The latter included two planks, a stake, two peg tips, a piece of wood with a hole through it. Another piece of wood was charred and two others were burnt. Other interesting artefacts from this large number of pits included leather shoes, wood and much domestic debris of pots etc.

In 1983 Antoinette thought that she may have found another Medieval pit, Med 42, close to the promenade and near to two other Mediaeval pits, at about a quarter of mile to the west from the main groups of pits. Close by these, near the remains of the Valkyr wrecked in 1919, she came across a patch of Medieval sherds on the surface of the foreshore. The nature of the position of the finds led her to believe that beneath them there was probably another pit but she did not investigate any further. About half way between these three pits and the two main groups of Medieval pits on the banks of the creek was another pit of the same era.

When Antoinette could not work on the pits due to the bad conditions, she
would spend time either back at Quex Park cleaning and preserving her finds or beachcombing looking for more possible pits and archaeological artefacts. She had a keen eye for spotting new pits. She used a fencing foil as a very useful tool for establishing the approximate edges of every new pit before any excavation began! Antoinette’s beachcombing finds were mostly of sherds, pieces of timber, bone and flint but occasionally she found the odd mine, bombs and hand grenades as Minnis Bay had been used as a wartime training area.

**Spring Tides Exposed Signs of Neolithic Activity**

One prized find however was a beautifully worked flint arrowhead, which she
spotlighted just sticking out of the sand. It was this day-to-day working that led to her discovery during extreme low Spring Tides of timber posts beyond the normal low water mark. These areas she called the ‘Far Flats, (FF) and Fence and Post (F&P). Lines of small posts were exposed including a group known as the ‘Fish Weir’ in the form of an obvious curve with a hooked return at the seaward end approximately on the line of the former creek. A measured survey of the latter exists and photographs of the ‘small posts’ are also in the archives. Some of the timber has been preserved in the PCM. The small posts are probably still in situ to this day only exposed during extreme Spring Tide conditions.

Also in this area, on the west bank of the former creek, pot sherds of the type of Neolithic pottery found elsewhere in east Kent were uncovered lying in a layer of blue clay topped by a thin layer of hard brown peat. These sherds together with a number of scattered flint tools including two polished axes, scrapers and flakes, some of it in pristine condition, date this site as Neolithic (Macpherson Grant 1969).

Making the Minnis Bay Discoveries Accessible

Unfortunately, age and ill health overtook Antoinette before she could successfully collate all of her work. After her death in 1997 attempts were made to organize all of the material she left behind. Volunteers from the Isle of Thanet Archaeological Society (IOTAS) spent several years, on a one-day-a-week basis, repacking and cataloguing her many finds. Others listed the paperwork and photographs.

The present writers, with their experience of working at Minnis Bay, have brought knowledge of Antoinette and her ways of working. The collation of all Antoinette’s archaeological material will enable the PCM to get a better understanding of the unpublished records of Minnis Bay that they hold. Then Antoinette Powell-Cotton’s work on this important site at Minnis Bay can be recognized and easily accessed by future researchers. Her work has lain dormant for far too long. To quote Macpherson-Grant who worked at the PCM under Antoinette’s guidance in the 1960s and 70s:

She was in her own way, an early ‘professional’ archaeologist and one of the few equally early proponents of the inter-tidal zone archaeology that is now considered so vital a part of national archaeology.

In the past two years the present writers have identified and located over 1,000 pottery finds and have listed and cross referenced them to the other records held in the archives. This will make it easier for the Museum to retrieve material for researchers. The reading of Antoinette’s Field Books is finished and extracts and notes are being recorded under the headings of the people with whom she worked, the conditions under which she worked, references to publications, the seminars she attended and other sites and museums she visited; her finds, references to surveys, plottings, photographs and drawings are all recorded together with snippets that reveal something of her character.

This introductory paper will lead to the more detailed analysis of the Minnis Bay archaeological finds as classified by Antoinette Powell-Cotton, cross referring her fascinating Field Books with correspondence, her card indices, photographs and the stored artefacts, together with other relevant correspondence and artefacts
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held at the BM and Maidstone Museum. The authors look forward to submitting detailed papers on the following in future volumes of *Archaeologia Cantiana*:

Belgic/Late Iron Age/Early Roman Well 1 to Well 30.

Late Bronze Age/[Earliest Iron Age] site, from Jimmy Beck’s Bronze hoard find of 1938 to the debate in correspondence between Christopher Hawkes of BM and Worsfold regarding the two stage occupation of the site.

Mediaeval – the many finds of leather footwear, now dry in storage but recorded by excellent drawings soon after excavation. Also the quality pottery found, possibly an indication of wealth in this 13th-century ‘port’.

The cliff-top inhumation pits and signs of habitation that could link with recent 21st-century excavation during a building project.

Further consideration of the ABC pits which appear to be Early Iron Age on the edge of the creek between the Bronze Age site and the Mediaeval pits. These include a quantity of preserved timber, including the wooden ladder.

The Neolithic site [referred to as Far Flats] only exposed at low spring tides, that has revealed flint working, flint items and pottery sherds.

All this will lead to the Minnis Bay foreshore site and the relatively unknown work of archaeologist Antoinette Powell-Cotton (Fig. 15) being fully recognized and,

Fig. 15 Antoinette Powell-Cotton.

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most importantly, made available to everyone in a form of which Antoinette would have approved.

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