

# State Archaeologist Brian Jones Remembered

by Shawn R. Dagle

Friends, family and associates remembered State Archaeologist Brian Jones this week as a kind and generous man with a love of archaeology and history and a deep passion for nature and helping others—a highly-educated man who would stop the car to help a turtle cross the road.

Jones, 55, passed away at his home in Glastonbury on July 4 about a year after being diagnosed with prostate cancer. Next Thursday (July 18) would have marked the fifth anniversary of his appointment as Connecticut State Archaeologist.

A resident of Glastonbury for many years as a child and later as an adult, Jones had wide experience in his field. He excavated and worked at many exciting and interesting locations both here and in Europe—including ancient Roman burial grounds in Germany.

Despite that wide experience, he remained especially interested in a series of digs in South Glastonbury at the “Hollister site,” believed to be the location of the earliest dwelling in town July 11, 2019 • The Glastonbury Citizen

built in the mid-1600s.

“I think the Hollister site really ignited this fire in him and this interest in him,” recalled Jones’s wife Margaret O’Keefe. “He recently said he wished he could dig there one more year.”

Jones was a New Englander by upbringing, if not by birth. Originally from Vallejo, CA, he moved to Glastonbury with his family when he was five years old.

“He grew up on the corner of Main Street and Overlook and would go off in the woods and play in streams and from that childhood took that love of the outdoors with him. That is why his job was such a great fit for him,” remarked Margaret

A 1982 graduate of Glastonbury High School, he received an undergraduate degree in anthropology from Oberlin College in 1987. After living and traveling in Indonesia and studying European prehistory at the University of Cologne in Germany, he returned to the States in 1992 and began to work on his Ph.D. in anthropology at UConn—receiving his doc-

torate in 1998.

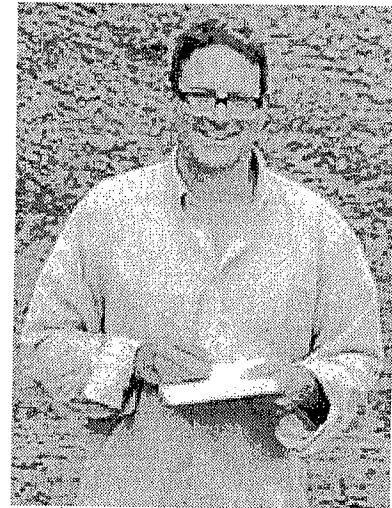
That same year he became a Supervisor of Field Archaeology at the Mashantucket Pequot Reservation, a position he held until 2004.

He subsequently worked at Archaeological and Historical Services and in 2008 became the Associate Director of UMass Archaeological Services in Amherst. He also taught as an adjunct in the Anthropology Department at UConn.

In 2005, Jones “came back home” when he and Margaret and their children, Tristan and Fiona, moved to Glastonbury from Colchester. He was appointed Connecticut State Archaeologist on July 16, 2014.

As State Archaeologist, Jones was responsible for cultural resource preservation in the state, reviewing economic development proposals, salvage archaeological field work and the collection of archaeological materials and assisting the Connecticut State Museum of Natural History and the Connecticut Archaeology Center in planning exhibits and programs.

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His family says the job was a perfect fit. During his years of study and work Jones developed extensive experience and knowledge in the field of New England archaeology from the Paleoindian period through the industrial era. One of the primary focuses of his research was the archaeology of northeastern Native American cultures. He also took a special interest in the peopling of the New World and made the archaeology of 17<sup>th</sup> century Connecticut one of his main focuses.

In the summer of 2016, Jones embarked on an ambitious dig in his own back yard, so to speak—a site in South Glastonbury he believed to be the original homestead of Lt. John Hollister, the first settler of Glastonbury.

The dig turned up a number of interesting finds, including three cellars believed to date back to 1650 or even earlier. Among the numerous artifacts uncovered were a padlock key hole cover made during the reign of Queen Victoria, rare Italian ceramic and a Native American urn indicating a close relationship between Glastonbury’s original settlers and the Native American population.

“The site provided a direct insight into how settlers lived in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century. In particular a variety of animal bones were discovered, including the remains of fish, turtle and deer—indicating just how varied a diet the early settlers of this period had.

According to Jones’s daughter Fiona, he “poured his life” into the Hollister site. She would often joke that the site became his third child.

“He fell in love with it because it is the perfect window into the 17<sup>th</sup> century,” she explained. “He loved it very much.”

Every year her husband would return to the site and more artifacts would be discovered, according to Margaret.

“It was interesting for him because it showed the relationship between the Native Americans and the Hollister family and how they worked together,” she recalled.

Throughout his career—whether it was working with young kids learning the basics of archaeology at the Hollister site or his work at UConn—Jones made an effort to make archaeology accessible and interesting for the public at large.

“He had a dedication to students of archaeology. He worked for UConn and he wasn’t a tenured professor but he often felt like part of his job was that the graduate students he mentored got something valuable out of it,” explained Margaret.

His love of archaeology and history was contagious. Whenever the family planned a trip somewhere, Jones would study up on wherever they were going so he could explain to his children the history of the area they were visiting.

“My brother and I were raised in a great way, with curiosity and respect for others,” Fiona explained. “No matter what time of year, we were outside every day playing. We were taught and raised to be caring about everything else around us.”

Margaret remembers one time in particular with her husband while they were driving in the car. “He loved all things nature and living and literally pulled over one time on the side of the road to help a turtle cross,” she remarked.

While Jones let his two children follow their own paths in life, his curiosity and love of nature and history made a strong impression on them growing up and influenced their future. “Without question we fell into his love of history,” admitted Fiona.

In high school she and her brother would join their father on digs. She subsequently devel-

oped a strong interest in physical anthropology and human evolution through the study of human remains and she is currently studying anthropology in school. Her brother Tristan minored in anthropology and has a degree in environmental sciences.

In addition to his interest in history and archaeology, Jones also was a home brewer, played the drums and was a martial artist. He earned a third degree black belt in Taekwondo. “He was also interested in tai chi and aikido and had studied that since he was an undergraduate at Oberlin,” said Margaret.

When Fiona was seven years old her father—a member of the Irish American Home Society—joined a band with his friend as a drummer. “They played a bunch of Irish music,” recalled Fiona. Through her father’s band, Fiona and her

brother were exposed to their Irish heritage.

Then, about a year ago Jones was diagnosed with prostate cancer. Though some types are often treatable, this variant was highly aggressive, said Margaret. He underwent chemotherapy and was doing well at first. In March they went to Mexico and he was doing fine. But at the end of May a scan revealed the cancer had returned and spread to his liver.

A celebration of his life will be held at the Irish American Home Society in Glastonbury on August 4.

Meanwhile, his family, friends and colleagues remain focused on the good times they spent with Jones and the special person he was.

“I am so grateful for the time we did have,” said Fiona. “He was the best father. He was amazing.”