2013 MICHAEL VENTRIS MEMORIAL AWARDS
FOR ARCHITECTURE

The Trustees of the Michael Ventris Memorial Fund would like to invite applications for the 2013 Michael Ventris Award of £2000 for an architectural project. Applicants should have a first degree in architecture, or a relevant subject, and the award is open to applicants from all countries. Two awards will be available for 2013.

This Memorial Fund was founded in 1957 in appreciation of Michael Ventris’s internationally acclaimed contribution to the fields of Minoan and Greek Archaeology and architecture, and his supreme achievement of deciphering the ancient Linear B script. It is intended that the Award should support a specific project, rather than a continuing programme of study.

Applicants should give particulars of their qualifications and academic record, and should outline the work they intend to pursue in the event of an award being made to them, including projected costs.

Applications should not exceed 6 single-sided pages (A4). They may be submitted either as hard copy – labelled with the words ‘Michael Ventris Application’ and sent to:

Roberta Jenkins, Architectural Association, 36 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3ES, UK.

or sent by e-mail (PDF files are preferred and attachments should be compatible with Word 2007) prefixing their email subject box with the words ‘Ventris Award’ to:

roberta.jenkins@aaschool.ac.uk

Applications must be written in English, and must reach Roberta Jenkins at the Architectural Association, complete with the two required references not later than 1st February 2013. Applicants must also supply the names and addresses of two referees and ask those referees to write independently in support of their applications, sending their references by the 1st of February directly to Roberta Jenkins to qualify for the award.

For further information on the award please contact Paula.Cadima@aaschool.ac.uk

The Awards are made by a Panel under the auspices of the Trustees of the Michael Ventris Awards in conjunction with the Architectural Association. Payment of awards will be made in a single instalment, payable after the announcement of the award and successful candidates will be required to submit a written report to the Advisory Committee on the work that the Award has enabled him/her to complete. S/he may
also be invited to make a public presentation of the results at the Architectural Association School of Architecture.

The Life of Michael Ventris

Michael Ventris

1922 - 1956

Architect and Decipherer of Linear B

Michael Ventris was born on 12 July 1922 to an Indian Army officer and the daughter of a wealthy Polish landowner. He was educated on the continent and at Stowe School in England. He spoke several languages at an early age and showed a precocious interest in ancient scripts, having bought a book on Egyptian Hieroglyphs when he was seven.

His interest in Linear B began in 1936 when he went with a school group to an exhibition celebrating the 50th anniversary of the British School at Athens. Sir Arthur Evans, then 85 years old, happened to be present in the gallery and showed the boys his finds from Knossos, including the Linear B documents. His teacher remembers Ventris asking: “Did you say the tablets haven’t been deciphered, Sir?” Thus began a life-long fascination with “the Minoan problem”.

Ventris wrote to Evans — who kindly wrote back — and soon published his first article on the subject, when he was just 18 years old. This came out in the American Journal of Archaeology in 1940. The same year, Ventris began a course at the Architectural Association School in Bedford Square to embark on his chosen profession as an architect.
In 1942 Ventris married Lois Knox-Niven, a fellow student at the Architectural Association. Later that year, in August, he was called up and joined the Royal Air Force. After a training course in Canada in 1943, he served as a navigator. Throughout his war service, he never forgot the Aegean scripts problem. Evans had died in 1941 — just in time to be spared news of the occupation of Crete — and Ventris corresponded thereafter with Sir John Myres, who had been entrusted by Evans with the publication of *Scripta Minoa II*, the Linear B tablets of Knossos.

When the war ended, instead of being demobilised Ventris was sent to Germany because of his excellence with languages. In addition to German he spoke Russian, and helped liaise with the Russian Army. He was finally demobilised in 1946 and immediately on his release visited Myres in Oxford, where he was invited to help publish the Knossos tablets. Ventris was too busy with architecture at the time, so declined the offer but stayed in touch with Myres.

Ventris finished his architectural degree in 1948, and was again invited to help with *Scripta Minoa II*. Myres had at this point also brought in the American scholar Alice Kober, and Ventris went to meet both of them in Oxford in August. The meeting was not a great success, and Ventris again withdrew, although he still corresponded with Myres. It has been said that Ventris withdrew because, as an amateur, he was intimidated by academia. While this may be partly true — and by all accounts, many academics themselves found Kober and Myres rather formidable! — a crucial factor was disagreement over how the tablets should be classified. Great progress on this was being made by Emmett Bennett, who was publishing the Pylos tablets found in 1939, and Ventris felt that if *Scripta Minoa* did not adopt Bennett’s scheme, the publication would be obsolete almost as soon as it appeared. In this he was justified, and a new set of transcriptions were later prepared by himself, Chadwick and Bennett.

In 1950 Ventris circulated a “Mid-Century Report” on Linear B, which he intended to be his last work on the subject. But the problem would not leave him alone, and he soon gave up his architectural job to work full-time on Linear B. His progress was recorded in a series of “Work Notes” which he circulated, at his own expense, to a group of scholars in various countries who were also working on the script.
Ventris was well on what would turn out to be the right track by February 1952 when he wrote to Myres about the Knossos place names. By May, he felt the code was “breaking” and that, to his astonishment, the Linear B documents were, after all, written in Greek.

Ventris had been invited to give a talk on the BBC Third Programme about Myres’s publication of the Knossos tablets, which was then about to come out. He took the opportunity to announce the decipherment and it was broadcast to the world on 1 July 1952. The talk was heard by John Chadwick, a newly-appointed lecturer in the Faculty of Classics, Cambridge, who got hold of Ventris’s material and was the first to write to him with congratulations. At this point Ventris needed the help of a professional philologist and invited Chadwick to publish the decipherment with him in JHS. They collaborated closely together for the next four years.

Ventris’s work with Linear B kept him busy, but he did not altogether neglect architecture. He designed a house for the family in Highgate, and in January 1956 began an Architectural Research Fellowship, working on the classification of data for architects.

In 1954 and 1955 he worked for the British Excavations at Emporio, on Chios, under the directorship of John (now Sir John) Boardman.

At the height of his fame and just weeks before the publication of his great joint work with Chadwick, Documents in Mycenaean Greek, Ventris died in a tragic car accident on 6 September 1956.

Ventris was awarded an OBE and an annual award in his honour, the Michael Ventris Award, was established in 1957. These awards, given to young Linear B scholars and architects, continue to the present day, under the auspices of the London Institute of Classical Studies and the Architectural Association, where Ventris took his degree.