

PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
**CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN
SOCIETY**

(INCORPORATING THE CAMBS & HUNTS
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY)



VOLUME LXXIII

for 1984

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JOAN LIVERSIDGE

HONORARY SECRETARY OF THE CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY, 1955–1981



JOAN EILEEN ANNIE LIVERSIDGE,
1914–1984

hard put to do without her help during these years; she was for a considerable part of the time effectively in sole – and active – charge of the Romano-British section, designing and putting up new displays as knowledge of Roman Cambridgeshire grew, and helping numerous visitors, researchers and students to make the fullest possible use of the collections in the Museum. She accepted with equanimity the need for total change of all her displays and arrangements during the last years of her life, brought about by the Museum's re-organisation programme; indeed she took the keenest interest in plans for the renewed Archaeological Gallery, and was as active as increasing ill-health permitted in the detailed design of the new Romano-British section.

In addition, she had been for many years an essential member of the team of lecturers in the Faculty of Archaeology and Anthropology. As an authority on Roman Britain, she also taught the subject in the Classics Faculty as well as for a number of colleges in Cambridge.

She wrote extensively on Roman Britain for general readers (including schoolchildren) as well as for professionals. Both as a teacher and as a writer she conveyed her own vivid awareness of the past as a world of real people in recognisable activities, and transmitted her deep enjoyment of her subject. Her scholarly knowledge was whenever possible spiced with practical experiment and homely common sense. As for example her collaboration with the authors of *Apicius*,¹ both in suggesting likely Roman cooking vessels, and in making – and eating – some of the more manageable dishes. Her description of the delights of honey-flavoured buns is a vivid memory.

Her museum work culminated in her co-operation in the research and preparatory ideas for the design of the reconstructed Roman kitchen in the new Museum of London in 1976. This brought into play

¹ *Apicius*, Barbara Flower and Elizabeth Rosenbaum (1958).

Miss Liversidge was for 25 years Secretary to the Cambridge Antiquarian Society, and proved to be one of the most important officers in its long life. She inherited and maintained high standards of activity in the Society's public lectures and publications, and upon occasions surprised and delighted her colleagues when she dropped her customary self-effacing manner in order to fight for the Society on some important issue of principle.

For many members of C.A.S. Joan Liversidge was the Society. Her deep interest in the dissemination of academic knowledge to wider circles and her almost passionate desire for the maintenance of the Society's standards and welfare – combined with her somewhat old-fashioned manner and quiet enjoyment – were, for the long years of her tenure of the post of Secretary, an essential part of all our meetings and excursions.

But this was far from the full extent of her activities. She was Honorary Keeper of the Roman Collections at the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology from 1951 till her death – a post which she took most seriously. The Museum would have been

her extensive knowledge and in addition called forth some charming domestic touches – a combination which is the essence of Joan; the whole project brought her great interest and keen enjoyment, both of which can still be shared by those who see the final display.

When she came up to Newnham College in 1934 she had planned a career as a musician. But her health and the interruption of the war caused her to turn comparatively late to the serious study of archaeology. Under the sympathetic guidance of J. M. C. Toynbee she undertook a survey of Romano-British villas (for which she was awarded an M.Litt. in 1949); she developed a speciality in the art of the province, in Roman furniture (on which she published a valuable book in 1955) and the evidence of everyday life. The breadth of her scholarship is seen in her largest book, *Britain in the Roman Empire* (1968), which brought her a wide and continuing readership. She became a Research Fellow of Newnham College and was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1951.

Among professional archaeologists it is perhaps especially as an authority on Roman wall-painting that she is best known – both for her work on the material they excavated and in numerous publications. Many excavation reports have been enlivened by her acute observations. She solved the problem of the high cost of coloured plates by developing a useful scheme of colour identification on black and white drawings. In 1980 she founded an International Seminar to further the subject and edited the first volume of its Proceedings, *Roman Provincial Wall-painting of the Western Empire* (1982). At the second meeting in Paris also – which ill-health prevented her attending – another new paper of hers was read.

Joan Liversidge was a Founding Fellow of Lucy Cavendish College and she served on the Governing Body from 1965 to within a few weeks of her death. She was College Lecturer and director of Studies in Archaeology and a valued member of the Education and Fellowship Committees. As Praelector from 1970 to 1982 she ensured that the College's graduands appeared at the Senate House in good order, and she presented them in beautifully rendered Latin. The College was also privileged to hear her play the piano from time to time, and the College garden benefited from her knowledge and interest.

Lucy Cavendish College has attracted many mature students to read archaeology and Joan's high standards of scholarship and her thorough and sympathetic teaching greatly inspired Lucy Cavendish undergraduates. Supervisions were characterised by a kind and hospitable welcome, which Joan extended to all her visitors.

Her great learning was lightly borne, for she was a friendly and homely personality; a pupil arriving for supervision might well find the chairs occupied by balls of wool, catalogues of plants or sheets of music, for she continued to play and was a fine pianist. Her many pupils recall with gratitude her real and practical interest in their work and subsequent careers.

MARY CRA'STER
MARIE LAWRENCE
GRAHAM POLLARD
JOYCE REYNOLDS

Countless students of Roman archaeology, professional and amateur alike, have good cause to remember Joan. Many will have sat through her supervisions in her crowded Museum office, or in her book-strewn study. And many more will have read and absorbed her books, which so successfully illuminated Roman Britain and its wider aspects. For, notwithstanding a quiet and unassuming personality, she had that happy and enviable knack of putting over her subject with skill and enthusiasm and, above all, with a deep learning, the fruit of a lifetime of assiduous study of the evidence.

Circumstances prevented Joan from travelling anything like as much as she would have liked, and her inclination was not for field archaeology. She thoroughly enjoyed visiting sites, and I have the happiest memories of showing her our schoolboy efforts at Grandford, near March, in 1962 and, two decades or so later, our work for the British Museum at Stonea. How interested and supportive she was! But her real involvement lay in the realm of museum and study. She very early conceived an interest in Roman villas in Britain, and wrote them up in thesis form. Out of this grew a lifetime's work on the interior decoration of Romano-British houses. *Furniture in Roman Britain* (1955) was an early and successful venture, but the main effort was directed at the study of wall-plaster. Techniques designed to retrieve information from painted wall-plaster that survives just in fragments were evolved in the 'thirties, but began to be widely applied only in the post-war years. Joan was to play one of the

very key roles in this work, as several general surveys and countless reports on the plaster from villas and town-houses show. Now classic sites like Winterton, Gadebridge, Brantingham, Verulamium and, above all, the unique Christian house chapel at Lullingstone, come readily to mind, to name just a few of her many projects. Interpreting these difficult vestiges of often complex scenes is a task requiring vast patience and determination, coupled with a fine visual memory of the comparative material – all qualities that Joan had in abundance. Latterly, indeed, she was able to bring together students of wall-plaster for a conference – the first no doubt of many.

Her interests did of course extend far beyond the realm of wall-plaster and furniture, and she wrote with authority on numerous other classes of artefact. But it is the more general books that many will remember with particular pleasure. There was an early *Roman Britain*, published by Longmans in 1958 and, from the same house, a *Roman Gaul* (1974), a brief sketch that merits wider attention. Here will be found one of Joan's firmest convictions, that Roman Britain must needs be seen in the widest context in order to set the province in perspective. However, it was in her *Britain in the Roman Empire*, published in 1968, that the definitive statement was made. This superb and massive book, researched in meticulous detail and couched in an approachable style that appeals both to student and layman alike, immediately became a standard textbook. On the one hand, it attacked the 'isolationist' view of Roman Britain and, on the other, it brought together a vast amount of hitherto obscure information. It will long remain a classic, especially when taken in conjunction with the slighter but so very useful *Everyday Life in the Roman Empire* (1976).

These services to the world of scholarship, both popular and academic, are reason enough for gratitude. But she adumbrated the cause of Cambridgeshire archaeology as well, as is witnessed by a string of articles in these *Proceedings* and elsewhere. There was a particularly good general survey of Roman archaeology in the volume edited by J. A. Steers for the British Association meeting in Cambridge in 1965 and, more recently, a paper on the cemeteries (*PCAS*, LXVII (1977), 11), an area of study that, rightly, she felt to be neglected by those responsible for setting up excavations. And, above all, there was encouragement for those working in the region, not least myself.

The latter years brought frailty, but no less enthusiasm for her subject. How good it was to show her the Thetford Treasure, and to see her excitement over this fabulous gold and silver, and to go round together our new Romano-British display at the British Museum, when it opened in October 1983. Like myself, many will count it a privilege to have been taught by, and to have worked with Joan, and it is good that she was able to set down in writing so much – and so well – of what she knew and thought. These books and papers are lasting memories of a scholar whose role in the advancement of Romano-British archaeology can already be seen as truly significant: for both as a scholar and as a person she was a very special lady.

TIMOTHY POTTER

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