

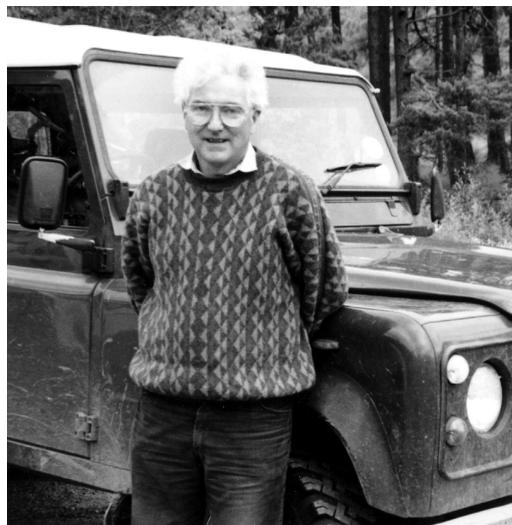
Obituary

J N Graham Ritchie

17 September 1941 – 27 April 2005

All recent Fellows of the Society will remember Dr Graham Ritchie, whose death came as such a shock on 27 April 2005. He had been a Fellow of the Society for nigh on 40 years, and served on Council from 1979 to 1982, as well as being Convener of the Publications Committee from 1992 to 1997. He lectured to the Society on four occasions, as well as organizing a day-conference on its behalf. He was elected President of the Society from 1999 to 2002, a role that he used to maintain stability in the organization rather than creating new initiatives, and he was certainly an efficient chair of Council. He delivered two of the Rhind Lectures to the Society in the Millennium series in 2000, one on James and A O Curle (the latter the first Secretary of the Royal Commission), and the second on Ludovic Mann, an enthusiastic amateur figure of the first half of the 20th century, whose positive contributions Graham thought deserved to be better known. These were published in the *Proceedings* for 2002.

As a member of staff of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland for over 30 years, he saw great changes in field-survey, and in the recording and publication of information about ancient monuments in Scotland during that time. Much of his work is incorporated into the *Inventory* volumes produced by the Commission during his time there, but he also published, alone or as co-author, more than 80 papers in a wide range of learned journals, including 33 in the Society's *Proceedings*, besides writing or editing a number of books and pamphlets, many of them in conjunction with other scholars. He also served on the Council of the



Society of Antiquaries of London. In addition to this industrious career, over the years he frequently accepted invitations to speak to local archaeological and historical societies (many of them more than once) because he believed that it was important to try to explain Scotland's past to its present inhabitants, and freely to pass on the information that resulted from the excavation and research of scholars.

The enthusiasm he showed for prehistory which so engaged his audiences was deeply felt and grew from his innate curiosity about the world before the present day. He had great experience in recording excavations accurately and writing them up in house-style, but he was always on the lookout for the quirky detail and the telling anecdote, which eventually would illuminate the picture memorably and to best effect. He had an inward reserve that sometimes led to excessive modesty about his achievements, but his careful precision, his sensitivity and kindness in dealing with others, combined with his superb sense of humour, meant that he was always well-liked by professional and amateur alike.

Born on 17 September 1941, he was educated initially at Daniel Stewart's College, Edinburgh, and later at Arbroath High School,

where his father had become Principal Teacher of Classics and, latterly, Depute Headmaster. He entered Edinburgh University in 1960 to read English, but was excited by the teaching of Charles Thomas and transferred at the end of his first year to Prehistoric Archaeology, graduating in 1964. It was during the summers of his undergraduate years that he was introduced to excavation at both prehistoric and early medieval sites. He then embarked on post-graduate research under Stuart Piggott on the subject of Celtic Defensive Weaponry. In 1965 he was successful in obtaining a post as Field Investigator with the Royal Commission, but continued his research on Celtic weapons in his spare time and graduated with a PhD in 1968. In the same year he married Anna Bachelier, also an archaeologist, who provided constant support in scholarly matters and has had a long and distinguished career in British archaeology in her own right. Together they wrote *Scotland: Archaeology and Early History* (1981) and the *Oxford Archaeological Guide to Scotland* (1998).

Field-survey with the Commission in Argyll was pursued with passion for the next 20 years. The work of the team of Investigators, Drawing Office staff and Photographers involved in the field-recording of monuments and the eventual publication of the results in the seven volumes of the *Inventory of Ancient Monuments of the County of Argyll* fascinated Graham. He progressed from being a minor contributor in the first volume in 1971 to co-ordinator of the final archaeological volume in 1988. Field-survey was accompanied by small-scale excavation, which was never particularly popular with his superiors, but, if new material or insights could be incorporated into a future volume, such work was agreed to. In particular, monuments from both the Neolithic and Bronze Age periods were carefully examined, and then, because of the need to have the information and illustrations ready for the forthcoming *Inventory*, his reports were written up expeditiously. The bulk of Graham's contributions to the *Proceedings of*

the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in the 1970s and early 1980s contain the results of such forays. Later, two extracts from the full *Inventory* were published by the Commission in response to local demand, *Colonsay and Oronsay* in 1994 and *Kilmartin* in 1999; and in both these cases Graham was responsible for bringing the projects to fruition. Aware that all this field-work and publication deserved to be known to as wide a readership as possible, he organized and edited *The Archaeology of Argyll*, published by Edinburgh University Press in 1997. In 1966, the National Buildings Record of Scotland had come under the wing of the Royal Commission and been renamed the National Monuments Record of Scotland; for some years Graham acted as its advisor on archaeological matters.

During holidays from the Commission he undertook freelance excavation, which included work for the predecessor bodies of the present Historic Scotland at the stone circle at Balbirnie in Fife (1970–1) and the Stones of Stenness in Orkney (1973–4), the report on which also examines the early illustrations of that site in the manner of his mentor Stuart Piggott. Anna Ritchie's work at Buckquoy and Knap of Howar involved both the Ritchies in the archaeology of Orkney. In consequence, they were together invited to write a guide-book, *The Ancient Monuments of Orkney*, published in 1978, which was and in its revised versions has remained a valuable *vade mecum* for the visitor to the islands. This was a formative time in the study of archaeology in Orkney in general, when other teams, for example that of Colin Renfrew (later Lord Renfrew of Kaimsthorn) were active, and the collected results were published in the volume which Renfrew edited, *The Archaeology of Orkney* (1985), with contributions by both Ritchies. Graham's cautious approach to the vexed issue of archaeoastronomy in his contribution was later developed in other papers.

In 1989, concerned that afforestation, then an activity with tax advantages, was destroying

unrecorded archaeological monuments, the Scottish Office made additional funding available to the Royal Commission to record areas likely to be at risk from the destructive process preparatory to tree-planting (a rare green initiative of the then Conservative government). Graham was asked to look after what was called the Afforestation Land Survey, for which new members were appointed to the Royal Commission curatorial and survey teams. The eventual overall remit allowed a certain degree of freedom in the choice of areas to be surveyed across upland Scotland. For Graham, this was certainly his happiest period within the Royal Commission, as he had his own team and was very proud of the results of their surveys. Publication was not intended as the main purpose of the early surveys, because Historic Scotland had thought that this might slow down the collection of the information, but after Graham had moved to other duties within the Commission, several of those surveys in which he had been particularly interested were made available in published form: the Waternish Peninsula on Skye (he had always wanted to survey an area from end to end and this was his first chance), the industrial landscape of Muirkirk, Ayrshire, and the Strath of Kildonan in Sutherland. In 1989, aiming to widen his administrative expertise in the context of the increasingly bureaucratized civil service, he embarked on study with the Open University and then graduated in 1993 with a Master's degree in Business Administration – one of very few archaeologists with such a qualification.

In 1991 he became Depute Curator to the National Monuments Record of Scotland. Although this was a change from his archaeological interests and training, he nevertheless assisted for some years with the preservation of both archaeological and architectural archives and their presentation to the public, relieved, however, to leave all aspects of computerization of the catalogues to more expert colleagues. Encountering such material had its advantages, and working with it over the years allowed the

collection of information that formed the basis for several later papers on historical themes, including the historical development of the illustration of antiquities, particularly Pictish sculpture.

In 1995 he was appointed Head of Archaeology at the Royal Commission, but decided to take early retirement in 1998. After his father's retirement, Graham had encouraged him to translate the various references to the Celtic peoples in classical sources, and this resulted in a joint volume, *Celtic Warriors*, published in 1985, and a further joint paper in 1995. After his own retirement he enjoyed several years of lecturing on wide-ranging archaeological topics on small American expedition vessels, *Explorer* and *Clipper Adventurer*, visiting sites from the western Mediterranean to Newfoundland. Between 1991 and 1999 he acted as amanuensis to Audrey Henshall, the doyenne of chambered cairn studies in Scotland, and their volumes on the chambered cairns of Sutherland and the Central Highlands were published in 1995 and 2001, respectively. His lifetime interest in France had led, on the one hand, to the assembling of a fine collection of French stamps, and on the other to an ability to lecture in French, which was much appreciated by audiences in Brussels, and in Bougon (Deux-Sèvres) in Poitou.

He saw archaeology as a visual and descriptive subject rather than as a purely theoretical one and he was out of sympathy with some of the university writing of recent years. He enjoyed seeking out and selecting the less-well-known illustration, or the engaging photograph, and helping in the layout of a page that successfully married text to illustration. Graham believed that the study of archaeology, as of many other subjects, required firm building blocks rather than wheeze blocks, and was proud to have been a generalist who contributed to the consolidation of good information in the public domain on a great variety of topics. Some of these topics were significant, some perhaps less so, but through field-survey and teamwork within the Commission, archive collection for the

National Monuments Record of Scotland and his very varied publications, ranging from Neolithic chambered cairns to the Arbroath Abbey Pageant, Graham Ritchie made an important and consistent contribution to the publication of archaeological and allied material in Scotland in a period when so much was being uncovered about the prehistory of the country. ‘Many footnotes among the varied stones of time’, as he himself – rather too modestly – put it.

John Ellis

BOOKS BY J N GRAHAM RITCHIE

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- J N G Ritchie and M Harman *Argyll and the Western Isles* (Exploring Scotland’s Heritage). Edinburgh, 1985 (second edition, 1996).
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