

# Sir Mortimer Wheeler, F.R.S.

SIR MORTIMER WHEELER died on 22nd July at the age of eighty-five. In his long career he held many distinguished appointments — Director of the National Museum of Wales, Keeper of the London Museum, and Director-General of Archaeology in India — to mention only three. These alone would be enough to satisfy a man of lesser stature. But he excelled chiefly as an excavator, notably of Iron Age and Roman sites in Wales, England and France. In this field he revived and developed the exacting standards and methods of General Pitt-Rivers. No less than five Research Reports of the Society of Antiquaries stand to his credit. Probably his outstanding achievement as an organiser and excavator was to bring order out of chaos in the archaeology of India and Pakistan.

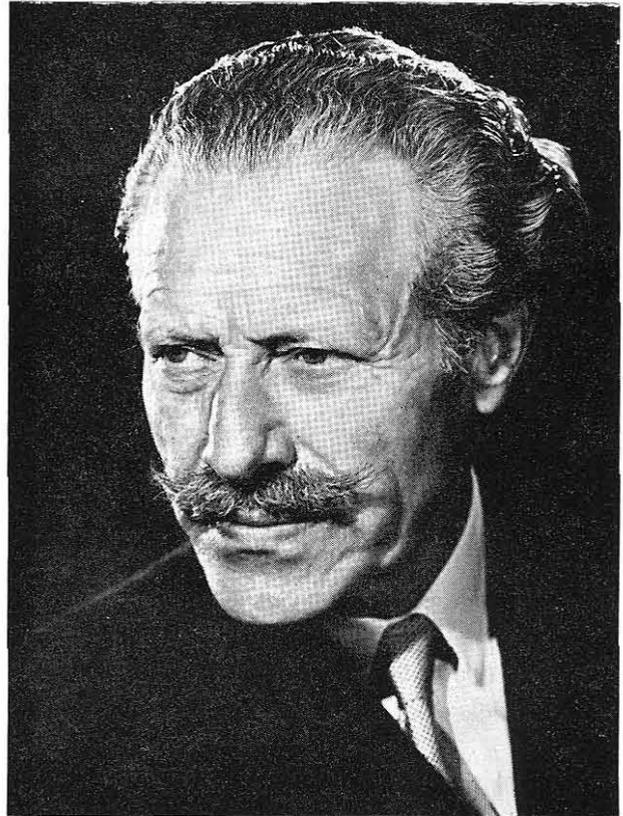
This brief notice should properly concentrate on his work for archaeology in London. As Keeper of the London Museum (then at Lancaster House), he himself wrote four Catalogues on London in the Roman, Saxon, Viking and later periods; and he inspired the Medieval Catalogue, still unique and invaluable for a legion of small finds of the middle ages. In these catalogues Wheeler set a standard and example seldom achieved by museum curators. Then in 1928, in the Inventory of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, appeared his masterly recension of all the evidence relating to Roman London. This again forms the pattern for studies of this kind.

The Society of Antiquaries, fully aware of the urgent need to record discoveries of the fast-vanishing Roman London, appointed an Investigator — successively Eric Birley, myself and Frank Cottrill — from 1928 to 1936. We were given accommodation in the London Museum, and worked in close co-operation with the Guildhall Museum. The structures thus recorded in detail, notably parts of the forum and basilica and the city wall, added substantially to our knowledge of Londinium. As a corollary to this work, it may be mentioned that one of us began the systematic study of medieval pottery, again with Wheeler's encouragement. Due to his initiative the Esher Research Studentship of the London Museum was founded in 1930, specifically for the study of the history and archaeology of London.

For years Wheeler envisaged the creation of an Institute of Archaeology in London, modelled initially on the band of workers assembled round him at the London Museum. A minor incident should be recorded for the benefit of archaeologists and others. One day in the early 1930s at the Museum, Wheeler picked up a newly-mended Roman pot by the rim to show it to me. The pot crashed to the floor in pieces; 'Let that be a lesson to you, Gerald — never pick up a pot by the rim.' At length the vision of an institute became a reality, due largely to his unceasing effort and the tireless loyalty of his wife Tessa. In 1937 the Institute of Archaeology in the University of London was inaugurated. Soon it became, and has since continued to be, a centre for academic and practical training in archaeology and cognate disciplines, attracting students and research workers from all over the world.

In another sphere, that of the learned societies in London, he played a leading and varied role. As President of the Society of Antiquaries his dynamic personality infused, encouraged and expanded work in this country, Europe, and indeed far beyond.

Later, as Secretary of the British Academy for nearly twenty years, his influence was crucial in gaining sub-



(Photo: Walter Bird)

stantial grants from public funds to support and promote research, not only in archaeology but in every branch of the humanities. Here again his efforts are of far-reaching and lasting benefit to scholarship in many parts of the world.

His service as an officer in the Royal Field Artillery in both World Wars was as outstanding as his peace-time career. In the first he rose to the rank of Major, fought in France, Italy and Germany, and was awarded the Military Cross for an episode of typical dash and daring. In the second he raised an anti-aircraft battery, then fought in North Africa and Italy, and attained the rank of Brigadier.

Rik Wheeler and I met about 1927, and our friendship lasted and deepened in the ensuing years. A personal anecdote is worthy of mention. Sometimes he came to parties at my home, and to lunch with my family. As always, my wife and daughter rose nobly to the occasion. The menu for lunch one Sunday: gin and tonic, then smoked salmon, roast beef, Yorkshire pudding and baked parsnips — said he 'Ah, parsnips! I love them and no one ever gives them to me' — a good cheese, a bottle of Burgundy, coffee, brandy and a cigar. After this softening up, I asked if he could procure a grant for me to travel on the Continent. 'Write me a letter at once, and I'll see that you get it.' A substantial cheque arrived in a few days.

As a small tribute of personal gratitude I will only add

two things. First, Rik's capacity to inspire others with a love of work and bring the best out of them. He had many images; some familiar to those who heard him lecture or took part in his excavations: others apparent to a wider audience on television. I like to remember him, long after closing time at the London Museum, work-

ing far into the night, coat off and shirt sleeves rolled up. Secondly, his superb sense of style and elegance in writing and drawing; in both his impact is still unrivalled, and likely to remain so for generations to come. *Non extinguetur.*

GERALD C. DUNNING

## Excavations

**City**, by Museum of London, Department of Urban Archaeology. A series of long term excavations. Enquiries to Brian Hopley, Chief Urban Archaeologist, DUA, 71 Basinghall Street, E.C.2. (01-606 1933/4/5).

**East London**, by Passmore Edwards Museum. Enquiries to Pat Wilkinson, Passmore Edwards Museum, Romford Road, E.15. (01-534 4545).

**Fulham**, by Fulham Archaeological Rescue Group.  
(1) A site in the grounds of Fulham Palace, producing Neolithic and Roman material and features. (Sundays only).

(2) Possible Neolithic site, Lygon Almhouses, Fulham Palace Road, S.W.6. (Saturdays only). Enquiries to Keith Whitehouse, 56 Tamworth Street, S.W.6. (01-385 6038).

**Inner London Boroughs**, by the Inner London Unit. Several rescue sites in various areas. Enquiries to Irene Schwab (01-242 6620).

**Kingston**, by Kingston-upon-Thames Archaeological Society. Rescue sites in the town centre. Enquiries to Marion Smith, Kingston Museum, Fairfield Road, Kingston. (01-546 5386).

**Putney**, by Wandsworth Historical Society. Two acre site at junction of Felsham Road and High Street lies on Roman and medieval settlements. Alternate weekends. Enquiries to Nicholas Farrant, 7 Coalecroft Road, S.W.15. (01-788 0015).

**Southwark**, by Southwark Archaeological Excavation Committee. Several sites from the Roman period onwards. Enquiries to Harvey Sheldon, S.A.E.C., Montague Chambers, Montague Close, S.E.1. (01-407 1989).

**Surrey**, by Surrey Archaeological Society. Enquiries to David Bird, Field Officer S.A.S., Castle Arch, Guildford, Surrey. (0483-32454).

### GENERAL EXCAVATIONS

*The Council for British Archaeology produces a monthly Calendar of Excavations from March to September, with an extra issue in November and a final issue in January summarising the main results of fieldwork. The Calendar gives details of extra-mural courses, summer schools, training excavations and sites where volunteers are needed. The annual subscription is £1.75, post-free, (N.B. £2.50 for 1977 Calendar) which should be made payable to C.B.A., 7 Marylebone Road, N.W.1.*

## Post-Excavation Work

**City**, by Museum of London, Department of Urban Archaeology. Washing, marking and sorting of pottery, bone and leather of all periods from Roman onwards. Times to be arranged — probably every day of week but not evenings. Contact: Diana Twells, D.U.A., 71 Basinghall Street, E.C.2. (01-606 1933).

**Croydon** Natural History and Scientific Society. Reconstruction and analysis of medieval and post-medieval pottery and glass. Tuesdays, 7.30-10 p.m. at Chipstead Valley Primary School. Contact: R. W. Savage. c/o C.N. H.S.S., 96a Brighton Road, South Croydon.

Identification of animal bones, c. 1300-1750 A.D. Tuesdays or Fridays, place to be decided. Contact as above.

**Fulham** Archaeological Rescue Group. All types of work and finds from sites in Hammersmith: Neolithic, Roman and later. Tuesdays, 7-10 p.m., St. Peter's Church Hall, Varna Road, S.W.6. Contact: K. Whitehouse, 56 Tamworth Street, S.W.6. (01-385 6038).

**Inner London**, by Inner London Archaeological Unit. Washing, marking, sorting, reconstruction, drawing, etc., all periods from Roman. Tuesdays, 6-9 p.m. at Imex House, 42 Theobalds Road, W.C.1. Contact: Elizabeth Platts at this address. (01-242 6620).

**Southwark** Archaeological Excavation Committee. Drawing Roman pottery. Mondays and Tuesdays 6.30-8.30 p.m. at Montague Chambers, Montague Close, S.E.1. Contact: Harvey Sheldon at this address. (01-407 1989).

**Southwark and Lambeth** Archaeological Society. All types of work on Roman finds from London Bridge and

Montague Close. Wednesdays, 6.30-9 p.m. at Livesey Museum, 682 Old Kent Road, S.E.15. Contact: Dr. G. J. Dawson, Cuming Museum, Walworth Road, S.E.17. (01-703 3324).

All types of work on post-medieval finds. Mondays and Fridays, 6-9 p.m., at the South Bank Institute, Westminster Bridge Road, S.E.1. Contact: B. J. Bloice or Dr. G. J. Dawson, as above.

**Spelthorne** Archaeological Field Group. All types of work on Prehistoric, Roman and Medieval finds. Mondays and Thursdays, 7.30 p.m. at 83/85 High Street, Staines. Contact: Mrs. Pat Croft, 19 St. Margarets Avenue, Ashford, Middlesex.

**Wandsworth** Historical Society. All types of work on finds of all periods, emphasis on Roman. Fridays (except last of the month and evening class holidays), 8-9.45 p.m. at the Putney Adult Education Institute, Hotham School, Hotham Road, S.W.15. Contact: Joan Loobey, 157 Longcliffe House, Arndale Walk, S.W. 18 4BN. (01-874 9369).

**West Essex** Archaeological Group. Drawing pottery from 17th century kiln at York Hill. First Saturday of each month, at 'Webbs', 30 Romford Road, Stratford. Contact: F. R. Clark, 62 Waltham Road, Woodford Bridge, Essex.

Drawing pottery from Harlow Roman Temple. Thursdays, 7-9 p.m. Place and contact as above.

**West London** Archaeological Field Group. Site-watching and post-excavation work in Ealing, Hillingdon, Hounslow and Richmond (north of the Thames). Contact: Alison Laws, Museum of London. (01-560 3880).