

## Angus Graham

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Angus Graham (pl 1) was born at Skipness, Kintyre, on 3 April 1892 and died in Edinburgh on 25 November 1979. His father, R C Graham of Skipness, a scholarly laird best known as the author of *The Carved Stones of Islay* (1895), is said to have laid down his pen when the news of his youngest child's birth was brought to him and, on returning some time later, to have found that the last word he had written was 'Angus'. Thus named, Angus Graham consistently carried forward the same literary and antiquarian tradition. At the age of six he witnessed his father's excavations in and around the old castle of Skipness; 81 years later he was still actively considering related problems.

Educated at Winchester and New College, Oxford, where he read Literae Humaniores, Angus went on to complete five years of active military service (1914-19) in France, Gallipoli and Palestine, collecting a bullet in the spine as well as a severe bout of dysentery from which his health never fully recovered. He returned to Oxford to read for a Diploma in Forestry and then served for two years as a District Officer in Argyll before Geddes axed him out of the Forestry Commission in 1922. For the next 12 years Angus worked as a forester in Canada, at first as a scientific adviser to Price Bros & Co Ltd, Quebec, and then as Secretary-Treasurer of the Quebec Forest Industries Association Ltd. He worked in the bush in the roughest conditions, but also found time to write a number of papers on forestry operations, while stories published in *Blackwood's Magazine*, followed by his best-known book *The Golden Grindstone* and the more specialised novel of French-Canadian Life *Napoléon Tremblay*, show that Angus observed Canada as keenly and appreciatively as he did any archaeological drama. The depression damaged his career prospects, causing him to resign and return to Britain in 1934, ill and unemployed (and with a Canadian accent, fortunately only in French).

News of the impending vacancy of the Secretaryship of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland was given him, his diary relates, by his brother-in-law R G Collingwood, with whom he had already collaborated in two of his papers on the antiquities of Skipness published in the *Proceedings*. Taking up post in August 1935, Angus left almost at once for fieldwork in Shetland, postponing the search for permanent accommodation in Edinburgh until his return. In one temporary lodging in Walker Street he saw a ghost, but in Nelson Street, where he finally settled, ghosts were not seen and only very occasionally heard.

Angus Graham joined the Commission at a critical stage in its history. With only three field officers, and no specialist photographers or draughtsmen, the executive staff were not equipped to meet the increasingly high standards demanded by the growing number of professional archaeologists and architectural historians to whom the Inventory volumes were indispensable reference works. Thus, the *Orkney and Shetland Inventory*, largely completed before his appointment but not published until 1946, was severely criticised on the grounds that, although the bulk of the monuments recorded in both groups of islands were prehistoric, the discussion of their significance in the introductory volume showed a lack of awareness of the results of prehistoric research else-

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where in Britain and the Continent. The *City of Edinburgh*, which followed, also disappointed some reviewers because of the comparative absence of plans and elevations, the inadequate treatment of the New Town (even allowing for the fact that the limiting date prescribed by Royal Warrant was at that time no later than 1815), and the dismal quality of most of the photographs. Angus accordingly found himself faced with the task of modernising the Commission by getting authority to recruit additional staff, and by improving the standards of both recording and interpretation. The measure of his success was the uniformly favourable reception accorded to the *Roxburghshire Inventory* (1956), to which he personally contributed important sections on items such as cultivation terraces and old roads.

He was not himself an innovator, and apart from editing, at which he excelled, his main strength as Secretary was his readiness to entertain new ideas, and to act promptly to put them into effect as soon as he was convinced that they were sound. The employment of air photographs to detect remains which were invisible to the observer on the ground, the introduction of official four-wheel-drive cars for cross-country work, and the creation of a photographic department – all these and other developments, which greatly increased the efficiency of the Commission by speeding up the production of the Inventories and by making them more authoritative, were only made possible by his ability to extract the necessary resources from a reluctant Treasury. Angus also saw the need to extend the Commission's work beyond the limits imposed by county Inventories and during the Second World War he and Professor Gordon Childe (then a Commissioner) undertook a demanding programme of rescue survey throughout Scotland, a task which was resumed during the 1950s, when staff were employed on a national survey of marginal land. Angus retired from the Secretaryship of the Royal Commission in 1957, but three years later accepted an invitation to return as a Commissioner, an appointment which he held until 1974.

Angus Graham's principal contributions to Scottish archaeological studies, however, are to be found less in the publications of the Royal Commission than in the *Proceedings* of this Society, to which he had been elected a Fellow in 1913 at the early age of 20. He held office as joint-Secretary from 1937 to 1966 and as Vice-President from 1966 to 1969, while in 1977 his services to the Society were recognised by his election as an Honorary Fellow, a distinction which he greatly appreciated. During his early years as a Fellow Angus made a number of gifts to the Society's Museum (now the National Museum of Antiquities), while the Society is at present benefiting from a most generous bequest.

As the appended bibliography demonstrates, Angus contributed a remarkable variety of papers to the *Proceedings* during the 65 years of his Fellowship. Although invariably disclaiming specialised knowledge of any of the topics that he tackled, he had a happy knack both of opening up new subjects for enquiry and of casting fresh light on familiar problems. Thus, his early papers on the antiquities of Skipness contained accounts not only of prehistoric cairns and hill-forts, but also of shielings, charcoal-burning platforms, bloomeries and whisky-stills, while his study of Skipness Castle was a classic piece of architectural analysis which completely overturned the theories of such acknowledged authorities as MacGibbon and Ross. Following his return from Canada, papers began to appear on subjects as diverse as brochs, cultivation terraces, clearance cairns, Border 'peles', post-Reformation tombstones, roads, harbours and canals, while latterly he made a detailed study of the history of Scottish antiquarian thought, producing several well-documented surveys on this topic. Many of these papers were the result of original fieldwork, some of it carried out in difficult conditions during the Second World War, and all were models of exposition, lucidly and economically written.

To some, at least, of his younger colleagues of the post-war era Angus Graham appeared at first sight to be a somewhat remote figure, whose reserved and formal manner might perhaps be

thought to reflect disapproval of contemporary attitudes. Closer acquaintance disclosed a man who certainly set great store by the old-fashioned virtues, but was also possessed of warmth, generosity and humour. Invitations to drop in at Nelson Street for a glass of sherry or white port provided a welcome opportunity for the novice to meet the established figures of the Edinburgh archaeological world and revealed Angus as an entertaining host and lively conversationalist. Even more to be savoured, at least in retrospect, was the experience of joining him for a few days' fieldwork, for whatever the task in hand it was bound to furnish Angus with some occasion to exercise his characteristic sense of humour, the essence of which lay in the creation of a manifestly ridiculous situation to whose absurdity he himself chose to appear oblivious. Tuition in photography provided endless opportunities for this kind of diversion, which might find him in the residents' lounge of a crowded Highland hotel, groping with the mechanism of a plate camera while enveloped in a large black cloth, or in some historic mansion, igniting trails of flash powder disposed in such a way as to convince the owner that the house was deliberately being set on fire.

In an age before it became conventional to wear unconventional dress, his fieldwork 'uniform' – consisting of a beret, his Home Guard greatcoat, and Canadian forester's high boots laced up the front – frequently raised eyebrows, especially when garnished with accoutrements such as camera, map case and field-glasses. Thus attired he happened on one occasion to visit Stirling Castle in company with one of the Commissioners, Professor (later Sir) Ian Richmond, and as they were walking down the Esplanade they encountered two privates of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders returning to barracks. The soldiers stared incredulously at Angus, and then, as the parties drew level, grinned hugely, did a smart 'eyes right', and accorded him the type of salute normally reserved for generals. Angus pondered on the incident until they reached the foot of the Esplanade, and then said quietly to Richmond: 'Ian, do I look conspicuous?' Characteristically, Richmond was ready with the perfect answer. 'Don't worry Angus,' he replied soothingly; 'all distinguished men are conspicuous!'

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