

Obituary

Margaret E C Stewart

Margaret E C Stewart was born on 28 February 1907 and died on 4 June 1986. Her early years and those of her brother, now Sir Stewart Mitchell, OBE, CB, KBE, RN, were spent at Eskdalemuir where her father, Dr Alexander Crichton Mitchell, was Director of the observatory. As Margaret Crichton Mitchell she was educated at St George's School, Edinburgh and went on to the University there where she studied archaeology under Gordon Childe, graduating MA with Honours and going on to gain her PhD. Her thesis, published in volume 85 of the *Proceedings* of the Society, entitled 'A New Analysis of the Early Bronze Age Beaker Pottery of Scotland' not only marked a fresh approach to the subject but also confirmed her own major interest in the early prehistoric which persisted throughout her life. The years of the Second World War were spent in Admiralty Intelligence.

Her marriage to John Stewart, a Perth solicitor, brought her to the county which was to become the main scene of her activities. She contributed much to the knowledge and awareness of Perthshire's archaeological heritage and this led to the increase of her own influence beyond the county boundaries. Numerous excavations established her as one of the country's leading authorities. Stone circles at Monzie, Crieff, at Scone and at Lundin, Carse and Tirinie farms, Aberfeldy; chambered cairns at Dull, Aberfeldy, and Clach na Tiompan in the Sma' Glen; hut circles at Dalnaglar, Glenshee; a short cist cemetery at Almondbank, Perth; deserted settlements at Allean Forest, Loch Tummel, and at Allt na Moine Buidhe, Rannoch; a circular homestead above Queen's View, Loch Tummel; the stone circle and henge at Moncrieff, Bridge of Earn; all were major undertakings. Add numerous minor projects along with on-going area surveys and the extent of her work becomes plain. The most ambitious of these surveys was her investigation into the location and distribution of cup-and-ring markings which resulted in a large collection of information to which she was still adding at the time of her death. The entries on her county set of six-inch maps, now in the Sandeman Library, Perth, testify to her energy. Her attention to detail was meticulous, her awareness of the destruction involved in archaeological investigations was acute. This, with an incisive mind and a perception which enabled her to use to the full the evidence she uncovered made her reports, published mainly in the *Proceedings* of this Society and those of the Perthshire Society of Natural Science, full and informative models of accuracy. Her interest in the countryside and its people in all periods enabled her to present a sympathetic and understandable portrayal of both monuments and builders.

This concern for people and their heritage led her to encourage the interest of local folk in their early background. Her student training took place at a time in the thirties when it was accepted that the dilettante approach to archaeology must give way to a more professional attitude. In the fifties and sixties, with the popularization of the subject largely through the media, Margaret realized how beneficial this must be for the future. She encouraged and directed the growing enthusiasm of groups of informed people insisting also that they realize the limitations of their enthusiasm. She was in great demand as a lecturer, was tireless in passing on her wide knowledge and ideas and was largely instrumental in founding a number of local societies. Volunteer participation in excavations had a

potential which she quickly realized and many of her students, mature and otherwise, went on to assist at projects all over the country. Inevitably, the creation just after the war of the Scottish Regional Group, Council for British Archaeology, including in its membership university departments, professional bodies and local societies, was a development which she supported wholeheartedly for she saw that it could serve precisely the purpose which she herself so strongly advocated – the coming together of all levels of interest and the creation of one voice which could speak for Scottish archaeology. That possibility may not yet have been realized but in those early days it was there – and still is. Margaret was successively a vice-president and president of the Group and latterly edited *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland*, the Group's annual publication which in her capable hands became one of the recognized sources of information on Scottish archaeology.

She served on many committees both local and national and was one of the founders of the Perth Civic Trust. In the early days of urban renewal in Perth she was quick to appreciate the potential of those levels which lay beneath the present streets and buildings and was largely responsible for awakening an awareness of this among the citizens of Perth and for the creation of a series of groups which undertook – and still do – suitable exploration when demolition created the opportunity. She was unwavering in opposing threats to conservation of heritage whether by individuals or institutions. More or less intense disagreement arose but this was invariably resolved in a manner which left her advocated solution intact.

Scholarship and public spirit brought Margaret the recognition she undoubtedly deserved. She was awarded an MBE and was honoured by St Andrews University when the degree of DLitt was conferred upon her. But the greatest pleasure and satisfaction came from her election by this Society as an Honorary Fellow, the first woman to be accorded this distinction.

The Stewarts were a welcome pair at any gathering. Margaret made no secret of the help and encouragement she received from her husband John. Not an archaeologist, he none the less had the ability to see beyond the irrelevancies which sometimes fudged the evidence and could suggest solutions to problems which, if sometimes wryly improbable, stimulated further thought and revealed other possibilities. It was understandable that their home in Perth should become the resort of archaeologists and others working in the area and their hospitality a by-word. Those whom they regarded as friends were indeed privileged.

The world of archaeology and the people of Perthshire have much to be grateful for in the life of Margaret Stewart and are the poorer for her passing.

D B Taylor