

## IN MEMORIAM

### BARBARA HARBOTTLE

1931-2012

Ruth Barbara Harbottle was born on 23 August 1931 at Gosforth, Newcastle upon Tyne, the middle child and only daughter of Thomas Milnes Harbottle, a Newcastle solicitor, and Marion Learmount, the daughter of a dealer in chemicals. At the age of 9 she was evacuated to Rothbury, and later to Queen Margaret School which itself had been evacuated to Castle Howard. In 1951 Barbara went to Cambridge to read History at Girton, where she was awarded a half-blue for cricket. Girton was important in that the historical training, particularly in documents, would complement her later archaeological career, enabling her to marry well the historical and archaeological sources.

Her first job was with the team producing *The Official History of the Second World War*, being assigned to the Far East section. Here she learnt to assess the differing accounts of events offered by the great war-time generals Field Marshal Slim and Lord Louis Mountbatten. However, she soon returned to the North-East, where she was to remain for the rest of her life.

Barbara started her northern career in the archives department of Newcastle Corporation, and her first published work was on an aspect of the muniments of Durham Priory. Her first excavation was at Blackfriars in Newcastle in 1957 and her work here continued for many years, a fine example of her constancy. On completion



Barbara Harbottle (standing right) supervising Corbridge excavations in 1963

Photo: D. J. Breeze

of the excavations in the 1980s, Barbara persuaded the city to conserve and lay out the site for public enjoyment.

In 1958, Barbara began the first of many excavations in Northumberland, working at Nafferton Castle. At this time, she formed a medieval group within the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle, and it was this group which undertook these excavations. One was the four-season programme at Newminster Abbey, with Brian Dobson. She also participated in the rescue excavations in advance of the construction of the Kielder reservoir. Three seasons of excavations were undertaken at Kendal Castle between 1967 and 1971 with investigations at the Austin Friars in Penrith in 1970.

Barbara was a meticulous excavator and the standards of her reports were equally high. She set out the problems, presented the evidence and offered interpretations. For my part, I learnt much both from her excavating technique (she was my first site supervisor at the Corbridge training excavation in 1963) and her reports which I regularly used as exemplars of the craft.

In 1975, Barbara became the first archaeologist for the newly created County of Tyne and Wear. She now devoted her main energies to her official responsibilities, one of which was to create a Sites and Monuments Record. For this task she recruited local helpers to sift archives and record historic buildings, as well as to excavate. Her achievements here included the examination and laying out of the remains of the Roman fort under the railway arches beside the Keep in Newcastle, the discovery of a milecastle on Hadrian's Wall beside the Westgate Road, and the investigation of the Newcastle town walls and the castle. She retired from this post in 1997.

In 'retirement' Barbara took on a range of advisory duties (though woe-be-tide anyone who ignored Barbara's advice). She served on the diocesan advisory committee for Newcastle and as archaeologist for St Nicholas Cathedral, and on the faculty advisory board for Durham. These activities were but part of Barbara's wider commitment to local archaeology and local archaeological societies. She joined our Society in 1962, becoming an active member, attending field excursions and participating in the decennial Pilgrimage of Hadrian's Wall. She served as Vice-President from 1990 to 1993 and then President from 1993 to 1996, continuing on Council thereafter. Her membership of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle was even longer, joining in 1951 and serving as President from 1996 to 1998. She was also editor of the *Transactions* of the Durham and Northumberland Archaeological and Architectural Society from 1968 to 1970. With Brian Dobson, she supported the CBA through production of the Archaeological Newsletter for the northern counties.

Barbara has left a considerable legacy. Part lies in the improved knowledge and display of the buildings she excavated, not least Kendal Castle, more in the many people she encouraged and supported, and in the archives she created and enhanced.

David J Breeze

I am grateful to various colleagues for help in preparing this obituary including Rosemary Cramp, Brian Dobson and Rachel Newman.