

IN MEMORIAM

RICHARD BELLHOUSE

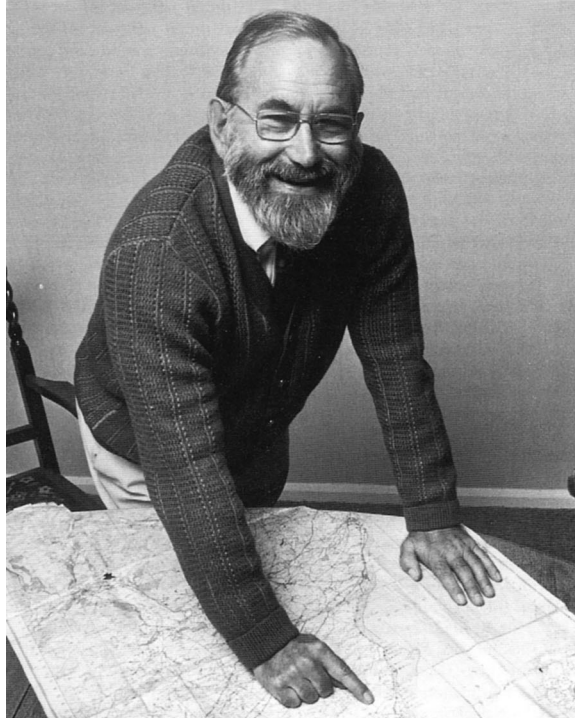
1916–2012

All interested in Roman frontier studies and the history of Cumbria owe Richard Bellhouse a great debt. In 1954 he took up the mantle of R. G. Collingwood, laid down over 20 years before, exploring the remains of the Roman frontier west of Bowness-on-Solway down the coast to Maryport and beyond, publishing his discoveries regularly in our *Transactions*, revising his views when necessary, and presenting the world with a coherent and, it must be said, satisfying pattern of Roman frontier control.

Richard was born in Darlington on 13 September 1916. He studied agriculture at the University of London, graduating in 1939. He thereafter spent most of his working life in the Ministry of Agriculture. His profession was land drainage and as such he acquired an interest in the land itself and what lay on it. Richard married in 1942 and shortly afterwards moved from Hampshire to Thursby near Carlisle. He came to Cumbria with a passing interest in archaeological sites, but once here his interest was fired by two chance meetings.

The first was with the archaeologist F. G. Simpson. In 1945 Richard was asked to drive him to Housesteads so that Simpson could plan his excavation at the north gate. Three years later he came into contact with Sir Walter Aitchison who encouraged Richard to study Roman roads in the area. Sir Walter also informed Eric Birley, then editor of the *Transactions*, of Richard's interest in the Romans, who in turn offered his encouragement. Thus, Richard's first paper in our *Transactions* was on the Roman road from Drumburgh to Kirkbride in 1952. It was, however, a Bellhouse family outing to Beckfoot in 1954 combined with a recent study of Collingwood's 1929 paper on the Cumberland coast and his own interest in the land which led Richard to his life's work as an archaeologist. Although Richard continued to study Roman roads, and other military structures, his main focus thereafter was elucidating the Roman remains on the Cumberland coast.

Richard gave a paper to our Society in September 1954 on the Cumberland coast and as a result was awarded a grant of £15 for excavation. That autumn he found three towers, bringing the total to five; £5 per tower, not a bad return on the investment! The first report on the Cumberland coast followed, and like so many of Richard's papers was accompanied by an appendix or two reporting on other smaller-scale work in the area. No less than eleven reports in the *Transactions* on the Cumberland coast followed, culminating in his *Roman sites on the Cumberland coast: a New Schedule of Coastal Sites*, also published by the Society, and prepared for the 1989 Pilgrimage of Hadrian's Wall. These publications were supported by work on the forts at Burrow Walls and Kirkbride and the cemetery at Beckfoot, all on the coast, while he also



explored and reported on the forts at Caermote, Old Carlisle and Wreay Hall, the Roman temporary camps at Troutbeck, and the kilns at Muncaster, Scalesceugh and Brampton, as well as contributing five papers on Roman roads to our *Transactions*. Nor did Richard confine himself to our Society publications. He contributed to *British Archaeology*, *Current Archaeology* and several newsletters.¹

In the late 1970s a new figure appeared on the Cumberland coast, the late Professor Barri Jones. Barri discovered ditches in certain sectors between Bowness-on-Solway and Cardurnock and then a palisade at Silloth. Richard was unhappy about the interpretation of the soils and proceeded to challenge it. A series of debates followed, mainly in the journal *Britannia*, but it also led Richard to publish two papers on soils and archaeology (*Britannia* 12 (1981) 135-42; 13 (1982) 283-97; 15 (1984) 232-4; *Proceedings of the North of England Soils Discussion Group* 17 (1982) 35-9; 41-7). With his particular experience and knowledge of soils and landforms, the antiquarian sources and modern archaeological discoveries, Richard had a clear advantage in these discussions.

Richard joined the Society in 1953. He served on Council from 1955 to 1964 and from 1983 to 1987 when he was appointed vice-President from 1987 to 2002 and on retirement from that office became one of the first Fellows of the Society. Richard also served on the Fieldwork and Excavation Committee from 1954 to 1964 and the Committee for Prehistoric Studies from 1962 to 1964, his service on both ending when he moved to Lincoln. He was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of

London in 1982 and in 1980 won the Silver Trowel award in the British Archaeological Awards. His commitment to the work of non-professional archaeologists was manifest in his support for the Congress of Independent Archaeologists.

The style of fieldwork favoured by Richard involved initial study of maps, followed by field-walking to seek out sites a task enhanced by his knowledge of the terrain, the probing of potential sites, and finally excavation to confirm the discoveries. Prompt publication followed. The final step was to place his research notes in an archive, in his case the Senhouse Museum Trust in Maryport: he had previously been instrumental in securing the Robinson photographic archive for the museum.

Richard was an amateur archaeologist in the very best sense of the term. It is the mark of a good excavator that his or her reports can be re-interpreted by a new generation of archaeologists: this is certainly true of Richard Bellhouse. His achievements were recognised by the production of a volume of essays in his honour in 2004, *Romans on the Solway, Essays in Honour of Richard Bellhouse*, edited by R. J. A. Wilson and I. D. Caruana, and published by the Society on behalf of the Senhouse Museum Trust.

Richard's professional work took him away from Cumbria, first to Lincoln in 1965, and then to retirement in Worcester. He died in Malvern on 3rd September 2012 just a few days short of his 96th birthday.

David J. Breeze

¹ A full list of Richard's publications can be found in: R. J. A. Wilson and I. D. Caruana (eds.), *Romans on the Solway, Essays in Honour of Richard Bellhouse* (Kendal 2004), 14-17.

