



PARKER BREWIS.

## X.—PARKER BREWIS.

BY SIR GEORGE MACDONALD.

[Read on 29th May 1940.]

William Parker Brewis—he ultimately dropped the first of his two baptismal names—was born at Tynemouth on March 22nd, 1867, the son of George Robson Brewis and his wife Maria Smith. He was educated at Harrogate. From the fact that on leaving school he was articled to Messrs. Newcombe and Knowles, architects, Newcastle, it may be inferred that he had already shown himself possessed of those gifts of hand and eye which were to make him such an admirable surveyor and draughtsman and such an excellent photographer. After completing his apprenticeship he spent some time in the office of another Newcastle architect, but he never actually entered on the practice of the profession for which he had been trained. Instead, he carried on his father's business as advertising agent to the North Eastern Railway Company until, at the comparatively early age of fifty, he found himself in a position to retire with a comfortable competency and devote himself entirely to the pursuits that lay nearest his heart. In August, 1896, he had married Norah, fourth daughter of Edwin Welsh Kellner, who retired from the Indian Civil Service as Accountant General of the Punjab. Their only child is now Mrs. Jolin.

His connexion with our society dates from his election as a member in 1892. For the first few years he would seem to have been a listener only. In April, 1899, however, he

read a short paper on *Four Ferrara swords known as "claymores,"* which was welcomed as "valuable by reason of its analytical character and the mastery of the subject shown." The speaker added that he was "pleased to see one of the younger members coming forward to fill up the ranks."<sup>1</sup> The society as a whole evidently shared his feelings, for in the following January Brewis was chosen as one of the council. The subject of this his first communication is revealing. The study of cutting and thrusting weapons of all periods was with him a life-long hobby, as he used to explain to those of his visitors who were mystified by the prominent place accorded in his library to the full-length portrait of a well-known figure in the fencing world. He formed an extensive collection of English, Scottish, Indian, Italian and German swords, as well as of Japanese swords and "tsubas." These, along with a few prehistoric weapons, some examples of Japanese lacquer and a certain number of ethnological and miscellaneous articles, he many years ago deposited on loan in the Laing Art Gallery and Museum, where they still remain.

From about 1900 onwards his close association with Canon Greenwell exercised a powerful influence on his mental development. Despite a difference of almost half a century in age, the two were on very intimate terms. Greenwell let it be known that he had the highest opinion of Brewis's acumen and of his knowledge of bronze-age weapons. Nor was it only in matters archæological that he valued his judgment; he consulted him freely regarding financial and other affairs, and finally nominated him trustee and executor under his will. The most notable outcome of their joint labours was the extremely important monograph on *The Origin, Evolution, and Classification of the Bronze Spear-head in Great Britain and Ireland*, which was laid before the Society of Antiquaries of London in April, 1909.<sup>2</sup> As Greenwell was by this time in his ninetieth year,

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings*, 2nd ser., vol. 9, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> *Archæologia*, 61, pp. 439-472, with 24 plates.

it is safe to surmise that the younger man must have shouldered at least his fair share of the burden. It was a singularly congenial task, giving as it did full scope for the play of his quite exceptional aptitude in appreciating the significance of details and arranging them in orderly sequence. Recognition was practically immediate. In the following January he was elected an F.S.A.

In February, 1923, five years after Greenwell's death, he provided an equally authoritative sequel on *The Bronze Sword in Great Britain*.<sup>3</sup> It was typical of the thoroughness with which he addressed himself to anything he took in hand that, in order to settle some points about which he was not quite satisfied, he should have constructed moulds and made castings for himself, endeavouring thus to recover a sense of the difficulties which the bronze-age armourers would have to overcome. It is unlikely that these two monographs will ever be superseded, and it is upon them that Brewis's reputation as a prehistorian is most securely founded. Although he published nothing else in *Archæologia*, he nevertheless continued to keep in touch with the London society in other ways. He served on its council in 1926 and 1927, and again in 1936 and 1937, seldom missing a meeting, considerable as was the distance he had to travel. He was equally faithful to the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, which he joined in 1928, and to the council of which he was twice elected, on each occasion for a period of three years.

Meanwhile his loyalty to our own society was, if that were possible, intensified. As time went on, his name figured more and more frequently in the *Proceedings*, sometimes as the author of brief notes, sometimes as presenting books or other objects to our museum, of which he had been appointed a curator in 1906. Perhaps the most memorable episode in his tenure of office, which lasted for twenty years and the termination of which was speedily followed by his promotion to the vice-presidency, was the compilation and

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, vol. 73, pp. 253-265, with 14 plates.

presentation to the society of a typewritten catalogue of all the prehistoric bronze implements under his care. When it was handed over, the catalogue, which had been illustrated by Mrs. Willans, was justly acclaimed as "a work of great labour and importance." That was in May, 1918.<sup>4</sup> Another gift, which came three months later,<sup>5</sup> was a transcript of certain Durham charters, made by Greenwell, who had died in the preceding January.

From prehistoric bronze implements to prehistoric monuments is but a very short step. Hence it is not surprising to find him in 1915 reporting to the council, along with Mr. D. D. Dixon, on pre-Roman camps in Upper Coquetdale, hut circles, cists, standing stones, cup-and-ring markings and the like.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, as early as 1909 he had contributed to vol. ix of the *Northumberland County History* notes on the prehistoric remains of the parishes dealt with there. So, too, with vol. x and vol. xii, which appeared in 1914 and 1926 respectively. In 1922, when the committee in charge of the whole undertaking was reconstituted, he was co-opted as a member. It may seem strange that there is no reference at all to prehistoric remains in vol. xi, which was published in the year last mentioned. The explanation is doubtless to be gleaned from the preface, where the editor apologizes for imperfections by a reminder that "the work was undertaken in war-time, when everyone had more to do than he could accomplish." Brewis's hands were certainly full enough. Besides attending to his own business, for he did not retire till 1917, he did yeoman service as a special constable, being a group-leader in charge of all motor transport in the city; it was he who would have had to look after the evacuation of civilians in the event of a German landing. Moreover, he was at the same time in the Admiralty secret service, and on more than one occasion visited Rosyth to lecture to the Fleet.

<sup>4</sup> *Proceedings*, 3rd ser., vol. 8, p. 150.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.*, 3rd ser., vol. 7, pp. 37-52.

After the re-establishment of peace, numerous papers published in *Archæologia Aeliana* from 1924 onwards—that on *British Brooches of the Backworth Type in the Black Gate Museum*,<sup>7</sup> for example, or that on *A Bronze Age Burial at Kyles*<sup>8</sup>—prove that antiquities of other periods never lost their attraction for him. On the other hand, it was in 1924 that he first yielded unreservedly to the spell which Hadrian's Wall is wont to cast over Northumbrian archæologists. He was one of the original members of the North of England Excavation Committee, formed in that year and destined to do so much useful work at Rudchester and Benwell, besides securing accurate measurements of the buried mile-castles and turrets which were temporarily exposed during the process of road improvement. At first he was, as a rule, the surveyor. Until younger hands were ready to relieve him of the duty, the illuminating plans and sketches almost invariably bore as a hall-mark the familiar monogram "P.B." While he collaborated in all the earlier reports of the committee, the first, which described what had been brought to light at Rudchester, was entirely from his pen. Apart from everything else, it marked an epoch in our knowledge of the history of the Wall, inasmuch as it corrected a current misapprehension as to the narrowing of the gateways of the forts. Previously it had been customary to assign their partial building-up to the final phase of the Roman occupation. Brewis was able to demonstrate that it represented one of the earliest changes made, and that it would be unsafe to date it after the second or third quarter of the second century.

He did not claim to be an epigraphist or to have any acquaintance with coins. Ceramics, too, he was content to leave to others, although his *Notes on Prehistoric Pottery and a Bronze Pin from Ross Links*<sup>9</sup> display exactly the

<sup>7</sup> *Arch. Ael.*, 3rd ser., vol. xxi, pp. 173-183, with 5 plates.

<sup>8</sup> *Arch. Ael.*, 4th ser., vol. v, pp. 26-29, with 2 plates.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-25, with 10 plates.

qualities which would have made him an expert in that department had he so chosen. These limitations did not in any respect lessen the value of his co-operation. Perhaps, indeed, they enhanced it, for his approach to the problems of excavation was primarily architectural, and it was well that he should have been free to concentrate. His *Conjectural Construction of Turret No. 18<sup>a</sup> on Hadrian's Wall*<sup>10</sup> is a typical illustration of his method, combining as it does a thorough mastery of the ascertainable facts with a reasonable amount of disciplined guesswork. In this case it is highly improbable that we shall ever learn definitely how closely his suggested restoration approximated to the reality. But his ingenious solution of the mystery that lay behind the peculiarly shaped voussoirs of tufa at Chesters bath-house has been universally accepted as convincing. He saw in them the remains of an arched roof, so designed as to provide an air-cushion which should effectually prevent the heat which entered the *caldarium* through the side-walls from escaping too quickly through the ceiling.<sup>11</sup>

In 1926 Durham University conferred on him the degree of Master of Arts *honoris causa*. Another happening which gave him genuine pleasure was the award of the O.B.E. in 1937, a well-merited acknowledgment of the help he had rendered to the Government in the administration of the Ancient Monuments Acts. As to that, Mr. F. J. E. Raby, C.B., of H.M. Office of Works writes :

“ In 1919 our Chief Inspector discussed with the local antiquaries the problem of scheduling the ancient monuments in Northumberland. The final outcome was the decision of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle, at the beginning of 1930, to form a special Ancient Monuments Committee to assist us. Parker Brewis was appointed its first chairman and he continued to act in that capacity until his death. The work of the Committee was of the utmost value to the Department who relied upon it for gathering the information necessary for the scheduling of the many monuments in the county.

<sup>10</sup> *Op. cit.*, vol. ix, pp. 198-204, with 2 plates.

<sup>11</sup> *Op. cit.*, vol. viii, pp. 278 ff.

Owing to the large number of ownerships involved, the scheduling of the Roman Wall and its subsidiary monuments was a large undertaking. Here Brewis was of great assistance, and he was constantly consulted on every question connected with the Wall, especially during the preparation of the Preservation Scheme under the Act of 1931. We all of us had the happiest personal relations with him, and he was always willing to give ungrudgingly of his time and knowledge. We felt that he thoroughly understood both our aims and our difficulties, and we were constantly calling for his help. Indeed, at times we kept him very busy on our behalf, even, I am afraid, when his health did not really permit him to be as active as usual."

In virtue of his enrolment in the Guild of Joiners and Carpenters he ranked as a freeman of Newcastle upon Tyne, a privileged position by which he set no small store. Not only so, but he enjoyed—and this not by election but by hereditary right—the much-coveted honour of belonging to the premier Incorporated Company of the city, the Company of Hostmen. His *Guide to the Keep* and *Guide to the Black Gate*, both frequently reprinted, as well as his articles on *St. Mary's Chapel, and the Site of St. Mary's Well, Jesmond*,<sup>12</sup> and on *The West Walls of Newcastle upon Tyne between Durham and Ever Towers*,<sup>13</sup> testify to his familiarity with the medieval topography and architecture of the centre of his civic allegiance. He took little or no part in municipal politics, preferring to give expression to his local patriotism in other directions. Thus, when the long series of original deeds accumulated by Greenwell was auctioned at Sotheby's after his death, Brewis became the purchaser and generously presented to the Public Reference Library all of those that concerned Northumberland or Durham. The gift included 467 items, ranging from the twelfth to the nineteenth century. They were calendared in a special volume of *Archæologia Aeliana*,<sup>14</sup> with an introduction by Professor Hamilton Thompson. Again, he maintained his father's close association with the management of the Dental

<sup>12</sup> *Op. cit.*, vol. v, pp. 102-111, with 9 plates.

<sup>13</sup> *Op. cit.*, vol. xi, pp. 1-20, with 11 plates.

<sup>14</sup> Ser. 4, vol. iii.



Hospital and was specially interested in the Dental School, to which he gave substantial monetary aid for research. Nor would it be fanciful to see a kindred significance in the site which he selected when he designed and built Glenbrae, the house which was his home from 1928 onwards, and where he was ever ready to welcome his friends with a hospitality as unostentatious as it was hearty. Perched high above Jesmond Dene, it commands a wide and pleasing prospect over the spires and roofs of the town to which he was so deeply attached.

By 1935 symptoms pointing to cardiac strain had been detected, and he was warned to be careful. Hence his declination of the presidency when it was proposed that he should succeed R. C. Bosanquet, whose lamented death had meant for him the severance of a long-standing intimacy. To one of his temperament it must have been galling in the extreme to have a restraining hand laid on his normal activities, but he did his best to be patient under medical orders and to walk warily. Notwithstanding all precautions, however, his condition failed to improve. Early last summer he felt compelled, light as were the duties entailed, to resign from the Chesters Museum Trust, of which he had been a member since it was first constituted in 1930. During the ensuing winter matters moved more rapidly towards a crisis. The end came quite painlessly on March 8th, a fortnight before he had completed his seventy-third year.

Parker Brewis served his day and generation well as a good citizen and a useful member of the business community, and he was fortunate enough to win a more than local distinction in two different branches of archæology. A glance round his bookshelves was enough to suggest that he found recreation in literature, but of his literary tastes this is hardly the place to speak, albeit it must be said that in discussion and in conversation he could draw upon a large fund of unexpected information on all manner of subjects. The photograph reproduced on plate XIII

pictures him as we shall all like best to remember him. Frankness and geniality were writ large upon his features. The twinkle in his eye and the smile that played about the corners of his mouth gave an inkling of the spirit of fun that was never very far away. The most abiding impression conveyed by his personality was, however, a sense of apparently inexhaustible energy. Just as he was quick in apprehension, so he was prompt in decision and rapid in action. It was inevitable that he should sometimes be a little impatient of those whose minds moved more deliberately than did his own. Yet his impatience was never other than good-natured; at the worst it would culminate in some harmless little pleasantry. And Mr. Raby's words as to his ungrudging helpfulness will be echoed by all who ever worked with him. They will long feel that the world is poorer and emptier for the passing of a man and a friend.

