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Professor George Jobey, D.S.O., M.A., F.S.A., Hon FSA (Scot)

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Our Society has lost one of its most distinguished and most popular members in the sudden death of Professor George Jobey on Thursday, 19 December 1991.

George Jobey was born at Percy Main on Tyneside, into a social context likely to encourage the twin characteristics of individual self-reliance and a sense of personal responsibility. His father was a coal trimmer, a member of a close-knit and tough community of considerable prestige in Tyneside's working society. After his elementary education in the local school at Percy Main, where he passed what we used to call the grading examination, George Jobey went to the local municipal grammar school at North Shields. There he distinguished himself sufficiently to win a place to train as a teacher at Bede College in the University of Durham. In those days, the combination of a degree course and an undertaking to teach after graduation provided an avenue for able young people to attend university without too high a level of expense to their families.

We can be confident that he already displayed formidable and varied personal talents. Perhaps rather surprisingly in the social world of Durham University in the 1930s, he was elected to the Presidency of the Durham University Boat Club and also to the Presidency of the Durham University Historical Society. In both of these roles he had to play a considerable public part as the chief representative of two of the university's most prestigious societies. He graduated in the summer of 1939 with a very creditable degree in history. The history degree course which he took included an archaeological component and Sir Ian Richmond later remembered that George Jobey did "excellent work as an undergraduate and was

among the brightest of his year at excavation".

For students of that generation the approach of war was something they lived with, and most of them, including George Jobey and his friends, fully appreciated the implications of the international scene of the later 1930s. Soon after graduation George Jobey joined the Durham Light Infantry, and rapidly proved a more than competent officer in the field. First a platoon leader, he soon became a company commander, for he combined personal courage and toughness with an intelligent appreciation of all aspects of this difficult job. One of his commanding officers later recalled the basis for the opinion he held of him both in and out of action as "an excellent regimental officer". "Reliable" and "trustworthy" were words which immediately recurred to him. He noted that George Jobey employed a quiet manner of command but always had a good grip of the officers and men serving under him. Typically, he made a careful and deliberate study of the soldier and made a point of understanding the problems his men had and their general attitudes. These varied military virtues brought him to the rank of Major, two mentions in despatches and the award of the D.S.O. for gallantry. His active service career ended with the severe wounds he received during the Italian campaign. After his initial recovery, the army sent him to lecture on his experiences at battle school and he then spent some time serving with the Royal Army Education Corps in northern England, tranquil months which contrasted strikingly with his previous fighting experiences.

On his release from the army at the end of the war, he returned to his old school at North Shields to teach history. This was a stroke of

great good fortune for those whom he taught there. They had not been taught history badly by contemporary standards in earlier years, but George Jobey brought a breath of fresh air into a sixth form which was then small enough to provide almost individual teaching. After his army experiences he must have frequently found his sixth formers irritating, and he had to revise his modern history quickly. He was amazingly tolerant, always encouraging and helpful, and he provided for his sixth formers that transition from being solidly taught to the experience of independent learning needed to fit them for more advanced studies elsewhere.

In 1949 King's College, Newcastle, advertised a post in its extra-mural department which combined the usual role of extra-mural tutor with specific responsibilities for military education in the region. George Jobey was the successful candidate for the post, and until 1957 he divided his time between services education and night classes in history and archaeology. Soon after leaving Tynemouth High School he married his old headmaster's daughter, creating the basis for the happy family background which was to sustain him for the rest of his life.

In 1957 the services education component of his work was wound up and he became a full-time staff tutor on the normal extra-mural basis. In 1967 he was promoted senior staff tutor. This was due to the exceptional distinction which he had already demonstrated in the twin fields of teaching and research in his chosen field of archaeology. Although his interest in the past was always broad, and he enjoyed his researches on modern history topics, he had already become involved in the subject which he was to make his own, the history of the early native people of our region. Understandably, our proximity to Hadrian's Wall and other Roman sites had led to a high level of concentration on Roman themes in the archaeology of northern England. Any researches devoted to the native society had been on a limited and intermittent scale. There were for example lists of miscellaneous earthwork sites in the north east, but there was little in the way of systematic study and explanation of their

development and their significance. As early as May 1960, George Jobey's involvement in this field was recognized by his election to the prestigious Fellowship of the Society of Antiquaries of London.

The way in which he contrived to carry out his prolonged programme of linked field work and excavation was perhaps as remarkable as its results. From his evening classes in archaeology in many different places within the region, he gradually built up a devoted and remarkably skilful band of helpers who shared his interest and enthusiasm for the work involved. They came from varied walks of life and from varied levels of previous education. They were prepared to work hard for what were often meagre rewards in the dateable finds and other evidence found on the native sites, which were often exposed and unpleasant to dig on. It soon became clear enough that the programme could produce valuable results, but the available resources were almost ludicrously small in comparison. Important excavations were financed on grants of the order of £25. The diggers, genuine volunteers, might give up their only annual holiday to work on a wind-swept Northumberland hillside while camping out in a local school building. It is unlikely that anywhere in British archaeology at that time there was any greater contrast between the puny financial backing and the value of the results achieved.

The extra-mural department of those years did not always provide an environment suited to tranquil scholarly reflection. Apart from the regular round of evening classes during the winter months in all kinds of weather in places as far apart as Berwick and Haltwhistle, George had had 17 changes of room in college by 1971. The first period of study leave he knew was the six months given him in 1981 to prepare his Rhind Lectures at Edinburgh. It was not unknown for some academic archaeologists at that time to be excused teaching for one term every year.

The entire programme of research which he inaugurated was carefully thought out, with one step succeeding another in a planned way. Gradually, by way of extensive field survey and

a series of memorable excavations, including Gubeon, Huckhoe, West Brandon, Burradon, Hartburn, High Knowes, Chatton Sandyford, Green Knowe, Burnswark, High Knowes, Belling Law, George Jobey created a new understanding both of the evolution of native settlements in our region and of the relations between Roman and native. Excavation reports were invariably published in good time and with qualities of lucidity and elegance not commonly found in that rather unpromising literary form. The often scanty evidence was sifted so as to bring out as much as possible in justified interpretation without pushing the arguments too far. Discovery of a palisade trench on a site would lead to a calculation as to the amount of timber needed to provide the palisade itself, and then to the implications of this for the nature of the surrounding environment. Where advanced technologies could help to wring the utmost profit out of limited evidence they were discriminately exploited. At appropriate intervals, time was taken to prepare summing-up papers discussing previous discoveries and their implications more generally, such as the proferring of tentative estimates of native population in a given area. When George Jobey began his campaign of research into the native sites of our region, there existed a confused mass of fragmentary and puzzling scraps of information. Long before he retired from the university he had replaced this with an orderly and intelligible analysis reflecting a clearly understood sequence of developments, and his conclusions stand the test of time. Anyone who has read in the 5th Series of *Archaeologia Aeliana* his later excavation reports, including those on the sites threatened by the building of the Kielder Reservoir, will surely identify the work of a master archaeologist at the peak of his intellectual powers. His distinctive work led to the campaign being increasingly recognized as a major element in the region's archaeological interests and by the early 1970s this had important results within Newcastle University.

Although Roman Britain in particular was a long-standing Newcastle interest, there had

never been a department of archaeology there. Instead Romano-British studies had grown under the aegis of the Department of Classics. In the early 1970s a department of archaeology was finally created. It is difficult to see how this could have been accomplished without the incorporation in the new dispensation of George Jobey's contribution from the non-Roman field. As it was, the initial creation was something of a cobbling-together job, with some elements in it which were not universally admired. George Jobey never cared much for the politics of academic life, which often understandably irritated him, but in the creation of the new department of archaeology he was unselfish, co-operative and remarkably tolerant. In ensuing years the contribution which he made to putting the infant department on a solid footing was crucial and second to none. His own increasing stature in the world of scholarship was recognized in his promotion to a personal Readership in 1974 and a personal Professorship of Prehistoric Archaeology in 1981.

His research had already taken him into Scotland on a number of occasions, for he was well aware that the present border held no meaning during by far the greater part of our history. His field work and excavation in the Scottish border counties, both in the east and the west, complemented and extended his achievements in north east England. It also brought him the appreciation of Scottish archaeologists, who readily recognized the value of this timely reinforcement. In return they gave him the Honorary Fellowship of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, an honour which is not dispensed lightly and which he much appreciated. The value of his contribution to Scottish archaeology was extended by the ten years he spent as an active member of the Scottish Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments and the Ancient Monuments Board for Scotland.

After he retired from his post at Newcastle University, he continued to be an active researcher, returning now to themes in more modern history. He carried out work first in the history of our local millstone industry, which allowed

him to combine archaeological field work with documentary study. He subsequently turned his attention to the history of cock-fighting in this region. Ill-health prevented him from delivering a paper on this theme to the Society last year, but the text was completed in good time and his study of this subject appears elsewhere in the present volume.

George Jobey was never just an academic scholar, however distinguished and brilliant he was in that sphere. He never lost his interest in our Society, which he served as a devoted and long-standing member of Council. He worked hard for us as one of the Society's Secretaries from 1957 to 1965 and as President in 1976 and 1977. He was a frequent speaker at our meetings and the regular publication of the fruits of his researches brought added distinction to the Fourth and Fifth Series of *Archaeologia Aeliana*. In retirement his researches included

a study of the Society's history, undertaken in part to underline his own concern that its well-being might be threatened if its membership base was to shrink further. The Society expressed its gratitude and affection for him by dedicating to him the Sixth volume of the Fifth Series of *Archaeologia Aeliana* in 1978 on the occasion of his 60th birthday.

His circle of friends grew with the years; and he was widely admired and respected both within our region and beyond. He was a most agreeable companion on social occasions, with a great sense of fun and an enormous fund of kindness. He was, as his commanding officer had discerned in the war years, invariably reliable and trustworthy. He never let anyone down. He was, above all else, always a thoroughly honourable man. In the affairs of our Society, and over much wider areas, he will be sadly missed.