

# OBITUARIES

## Barbara Harbottle

### 1931–2012



With the death of Barbara Harbottle the North of England has lost a major champion of its heritage and a fount of knowledge on all things relating to the history, archaeology and architecture of the region.

Born Ruth Barbara Harbottle on 23 August 1931, in Gosforth, to Thomas Milnes Harbottle and his wife Marion Learmount, Barbara spent her early life in Rothbury being privately educated with her two brothers and the children of two other families who had been evacuated from Tyneside during the war. She then attended Queen Margaret's in York, a school which had been evacuated to Castle Howard. It may have been her childhood years exploring round Rothbury, or her time in the atmosphere of Castle Howard that confirmed her interest in history, but it was a love that she had

inherited from her father and from his friend, the antiquary Charles Hunter Blair, both of whom had a great influence on her. She had already joined the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne when she went up to Cambridge to read History at Girton in 1951.

After she graduated she moved to London to join the team that was preparing the Official History of the Second World War, and she met and interviewed many of the great generals of that period. Her heart, however, was in the North, and she soon moved back to work in the archives department of Newcastle Corporation. She became involved in archaeology through the annual excavations at Corbridge Roman site, run by Durham University. It was at Corbridge that she honed her excavation skills and made some life-long friends amongst the northern archaeological fraternity.

Her interests, however, lay more with the medieval period than with the Romans. She formed a medieval section in the Society of Antiquaries and with their help she began excavating medieval sites in the region. Her excavation of Nafferton Castle, between 1958 and 1960, was an early achievement but she had already started work at Blackfriars in Newcastle in 1957. She continued excavations at Blackfriars through the 1960s, 1970s and in 1985, as parts of the site became available, and she was finally able to confirm the thirteenth-century plan of the buildings which enabled the City to conserve and landscape the site we see today.

It is difficult now to realise how innovative Barbara's work was in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Only Mike Jarrett's work at the deserted medieval village of West Whelpington had preceded her, and the digging team from that site was to join her and Brian Dobson for their three seasons of excavation at Newminster Abbey. Her new approach was to place sites in their regional context, using archives and the aerial photographs taken by Norman McCord.

Their collaborative work on rural medieval sites was the beginning of medieval landscape archaeology in this region — work which led the field for British landscape studies.

Between 1964 and 1974 Barbara extended her interests to sites in Cumbria, excavating at Kendal Castle and at Austin Friars, Penrith, whilst continuing work in Newcastle at Gunner Tower. In this she was helped by a wide range of volunteers: dentists, doctors, teachers, miners, and students of all ages. She had great skills in building enthusiastic teams and in engaging people (whoever they were) in their heritage. This often involved large and complex dinners, picnics, and skinny-dipping parties, as well as hours in archives offices or in trenches.

She was a very hard worker, with boundless energy, which saw her working for the Adult Education Departments in both Durham and Newcastle, as well as producing the *Archaeological Newsletter for Northumberland, Cumberland and Westmorland*. In 1972 this amalgamated with the newsletter for Durham to become the Council for British Archaeology's revived Northern Group. From the mid-1960s she worked part-time for the School of Architecture at Newcastle University, inspiring architecture students with a love of ancient buildings. In 1974, when the Metropolitan County of Tyne and Wear was established, she became its first County Archaeologist, a post which amalgamated her interests in archaeology, archives, and standing buildings with her love of getting things done. From this time on her archaeological activities were confined to Newcastle, bar a short campaign at Etal Castle. As well as working with planning issues, she was also able to enthuse younger colleagues and to bring volunteers in to help with recording and archive searches. Many professional archaeologists in the region owe much of their post-university training to Barbara's support and guidance.

When she retired in 1997 she encouraged the revival of the Victoria County History for Durham, and she edited its newsletter. She was a member of the Newcastle Diocesan Advisory Council and of the Durham Cathedral Fabric Advisory Committee; she was also the Newcastle Cathedral Archaeologist, a post that she retired from only shortly before her death. (Even the day before she died she was discussing her progress with recording and publishing the ledger stones in St Nicholas's Cathedral.) She was also generous in using her skills to help at Woodhorn on the archive of this Society, and at the Hancock on the material held by the Natural History Society of Northumbria.

She was President of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society from 1993 to 1996, and President of our Society from 1996 to 1998. She remained an active member on the Councils of both societies until her death.

To concentrate on her heritage work is to cover only one facet of her life. Barbara was also a keen sailor and ornithologist, and a devoted — if occasionally unnerving — aunt and great aunt to her large family. She had wide interests and a wide circle of friends, over 400 of whom attended her memorial service at St Nicholas's Cathedral.

Barbara Harbottle was an outstanding archaeologist with the rare ability to use her excavation skills, her knowledge of buildings, and her mastery of archives to produce authoritative and readable publications. She fully understood the importance of recording, and during her time as County Archaeologist for Tyne and Wear she ensured that the county's Sites and Monuments Record was as complete and as accessible as possible. Not one to suffer fools gladly, she was yet able to enthuse young and old with an interest in the past. She will be greatly missed but her legacy will serve the people of the North of England for many years.

Lindsay Allason-Jones

## Brian Dobson

1931–2012



Brian Dobson died on 19 July 2012 aged 80. A native of the North East of England, he remained true to his roots. He was born in Hartlepool in 1931, educated at Stockton Grammar School, and went up to Hatfield College, Durham University, in 1949 to read Modern History. Here he fell under the spell of Eric Birley, taking the Roman Britain special subject, and subsequently gaining his PhD on the *primipilares* (the senior centurions) of the Roman army from the same university and under the same supervisor. National Service then intervened, with basic training at Carlisle Castle followed by a Russian Language course. Brian spent 1957–9 in Birmingham as a Research Fellow, there meeting — and being influenced by — the inspirational adult education tutor Graham Webster. On 1 January 1960 he returned to Durham as adult education Lecturer in Archaeology in

the University's Department of Extra Mural Studies, responsible for archaeology courses in County Durham. He spent the whole of his working life in that post, retiring in 1990.

Brian was not primarily a 'dirt archaeologist', but he undertook an excavation at Binchester with Mike Jarrett, supervised on the university training excavations and administered the adult education excavations, both at Corbridge, and helped Barbara Harbottle at Newminster. He also, with Barbara, produced the *Archaeological Newsletter* for the northern counties.

In 1968, Brian launched a new venture, a week-long study tour of Hadrian's Wall and Hadrian's Army, with myself as junior partner, later to be joined by Val Maxfield. This tour proved an instant success. Brian subsequently split the two elements. The Hadrian's Wall courses continued, including expeditions to other frontiers, notably in Europe, where the whole of the line from the North Sea to the south of Hungary was eventually explored. The Roman Army school continues to this day. Several of his adult students, inspired by Brian, became notable Wall scholars in their own right, publishing mainly in *Archaeologia Aeliana*. Brian's students — amateur and professional — acknowledged their debt to him by the presentation of two *Festschriften*: the first to celebrate his 25 years as an adult education lecturer; the second marking the occasion of his 70th birthday. In 1972, in reaction to the considerable interest shown in his courses, Brian founded the Hadrianic Society to further the study of Hadrian's Wall and the Roman army. Although ill, he was able to attend the 40th anniversary celebrations in Durham earlier this year and to deliver the main speech.

Brian's early publications were on the Roman army. Amongst these was his revision of Domaszewski's classic work on the officers of the Roman army, *Die Rangordnung des römischen Heeres*. This was published in 1968 and had involved a period of research in Bonn, following a spell in Freiburg im Breisgau with Herbert Nesselhauf in 1955–6 while undertaking research for his PhD. His doctorate was published, in German, under the title *Die Primipilares* in 1978. In the 1980s, he had the distinction of being awarded membership of the prestigious Institute for Advanced Studies at Princeton, New Jersey. A collection of his Roman army papers was published in *Roman Officers and Frontiers* in 1993.

Brian's first publication on Hadrian's Wall was in 1969, in *Archaeologia Aeliana*. In 1976 he and I collaborated on the production of *Hadrian's Wall*, still in print in its fourth edition. This was the first historical account — as opposed to description — of Hadrian's Wall, and it has been described by Nick Hodgson as revolutionary for in many areas it discarded long-held views and offered new interpretations. Brian's 1985 Horsley Memorial Lecture, 'The function of Hadrian's Wall' (*AA*<sup>5</sup>, 14, 1–30), remains fundamental reading for anyone seeking to understand the purpose of the frontier. In 1980, the University of Durham acknowledged Brian's contribution to scholarship through the award of a personal Readership in Archaeology, a rare accolade for a lecturer in adult education.

Brian joined this Society in 1960. He was a regular attender at meetings and participated in every Pilgrimage of Hadrian's Wall from 1959 to 2009. He served on Council from 1978 to 1981, as Vice President from 1987 to 1993, and as President from 1993 to 1995. He was President of the Architectural and Archaeological Society of Durham and Northumberland from 1983 to 1987, and he was co-editor or sole editor of volumes 1 to 3 of the New Series of their Transactions. He was also a member of several local trusts, including those of Chesters, Corbridge, and Maryport museums. What gave him particular pleasure was his membership of the Vindolanda Trust from 1996 to 2011. Here, as elsewhere, his loyalty was not only to the local archaeological community, but also to his local compatriots. This was particularly reflected in three publications of which he was co-editor: *Britain and Rome, Essays presented to Eric Birley*, with Michael Jarrett; *Roman Frontier Studies 1969*, the report of the Congress of Roman Frontier Studies in Cardiff, with Eric Birley and Michael Jarrett; and *Kaiser, Heer und Gesellschaft in der römischen Kaiserzeit : Gedenkschrift für Eric Birley*, a volume of essays in memory of Eric Birley, with Géza Alföldy and Werner Eck.

Brian had an international reputation as a scholar and was an inspiring teacher who brought many into archaeology and helped their development. He was widely respected for his integrity and wisdom, but he was loved for his quiet warmth, for the twinkle in his eye, and for his kindly wit. In 1958, Brian married Anne Priestley. Theirs was a long and happy marriage, blessed by five children. Anne always supported Brian in all aspects of his work and many members will recall that in retirement she frequently accompanied him to Society meetings.

David J. Breeze