

Obituary

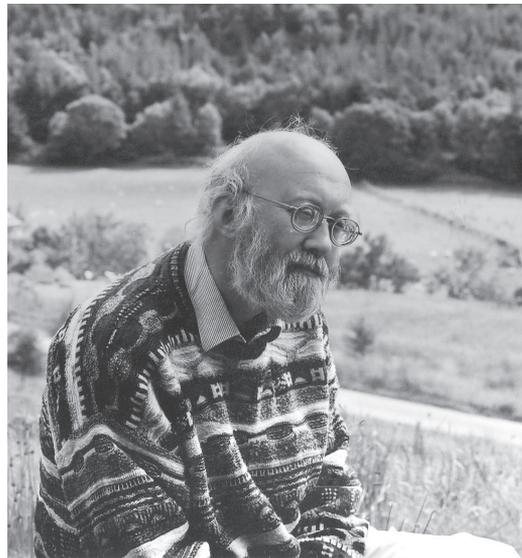
Ian Alexander George Shepherd

22 March 1951 – 15 May 2009

Ian Shepherd, the doyen of the Scottish Local Authority archaeologists, and an unrivalled authority on the archaeology and architecture of North-East Scotland and internationally respected Bronze Age specialist, died in his adopted city of Aberdeen at the early age of 58.

Born at Leancoil Hospital in Forres, Moray, and brought up in Linlithgow and then Biggar, where his father James was Headmaster, Ian attended George Watson's in Edinburgh before going on to Edinburgh University. There he initially read Scottish History, but soon changed tack to study Prehistoric Archaeology under Professor Stuart Piggott.

My first memories of Ian date to the autumn of 1969 when, fresh from boarding at Watson's 'bug-hut' in Spylaw Road, he was striding purposefully as a new undergraduate round George Square. His trademark beard was already there, complemented by shoulder-length hair, Buddy Holly glasses, blue smoke curling from a *Gitane* on his lower lip, and a rather fetching fur coat evidently too long to have been requisitioned from his mother. He was plainly going to seize student life with both hands; and happy memories of those days include in particular recollections of fieldwork alongside him in Fife and Kincardineshire, but above all on Orkney, with Anna Ritchie and the late Graham Ritchie. A Waverley ritual at the start of the train journey north was to pull down the compartment blinds in the old corridor coaches and to shout at each other in an obscure east European language of our invention to ensure others kept away and that we retained enough space to stretch out for a sleep on the long haul beyond Drumochter. It was at Anna Ritchie's



important site of Buckquoy that we began a tradition of singing duets – with relish but wholly tunelessly – to accompany labouring, a habit from which many have suffered. It was also at that site that Ian met his future wife Alexandra (Lekky), beginning a partnership that lasted nearly 40 years until his death.

Ian's 1973 MA dissertation on the V-perforated buttons of Britain and Ireland showed him to be an exceptionally talented student and marked the beginning of a lifelong interest in Bronze Age archaeology. An updated version of that ground-breaking work was published in the *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* (Shepherd 2009). After graduation, Ian began work on his doctorate on Beaker pottery accessories in the autumn of that year. That project, however, was shortly to be set aside

when a new archaeological position, the fruit of efforts by the Aberdeen Archaeology Research Group to develop local archaeology in the North-East, was advertised.

In 1975, Ian was appointed as Regional Archaeologist in Trevor Sprott's Department of Physical Planning in the newly-formed Grampian Regional Council – where he was the first such post-holder in a Scotland where the management of field archaeology had long been considered the unique preserve of central Government. Much of the initial pressure to establish such posts emanated from this Society, notably under the influence of Dr Grant Simpson. That the novelty of a local authority archaeological post seems altogether bizarre some 35 years later is in no small measure due to Ian's achievements. Once there, virtually from scratch and largely single-handedly, he enthusiastically and effectively set about the development of all the components of a local authority archaeological service for North-East Scotland. After local government reorganisation in 1996 Ian's role continued within the newly-created Aberdeenshire Council. He was eventually Principal Archaeologist and Team Leader for this authority, managing a small team of archaeologists located within Aberdeenshire, but also contracted to oversee cultural heritage matters for the neighbouring local authority areas of Angus and Moray.

His important work inside the planning system and the council was complemented by numerous other activities – by programmes of aerial survey, by broadcasting and extra-mural and other lecturing, by fieldwork and excavation, and by his writing. Ian wrote cogently on numerous issues concerning archaeology and planning, especially on the deleterious impacts of certain forestry schemes, which worried him considerably. He was, in due course, the obvious authority to contribute the Scottish dimension to the local authority chapter in *Archaeological Resource Management in the UK* (1993/2006).

Many archaeologists benefited from the support and advice Ian was able to bring to

their projects in the region, notably Professor Richard Bradley in the course of his recent work on recumbent stone circles and latterly at Broomend of Crichton, Alan Saville during his work on the Buchan gravels, and Shannon Fraser and Charlie and Hilary Murray during the examination of the timber hall in the policies of Crathes Castle. In my own case, the site in question was the fortified promontory of Burghead, Moray, for which he had a special affection, since it was the birthplace of his mother, Doreen, and the site of boyhood holidays.

Ian also contributed tirelessly and significantly to a wide range of Trusts and other initiatives in the North-East. These included Elgin Archaeological Heritage; Kinloss Abbey; Pitsligo Castle; Burghead Headland; the Museum of Scottish Lighthouses, Fraserburgh; Archaeolink Prehistory Park, Oyne; and Aberdeenshire Historic Kirkyards. Ian was key in particular to the establishment of *Archaeolink*. But he ranged more widely than simply archaeological concerns and was also, for example, a strong supporter of the Aberdeenshire Council Design Awards Scheme. In a very real sense, however, the places that are his monuments are blended into this heartland of Scotland, whose field archaeology, historic buildings and landscapes he knew intimately and which he cherished.

His important work inside the planning system and the wider local authority world was soon extended into research and teaching, for he was, beyond his core duties, both a keen populariser and a serious academic researcher. Ian spread the word on local archaeology by extra-mural and other lecturing in Aberdeen and well beyond, presenting talks on a wide variety of topics, all illustrated by the burgeoning collection of elegant colour transparencies of North-East sites he took both at ground level and from the air. For several years, too, he lectured to postgraduate students in Cultural Resource Management at Edinburgh University, contributing the unique perspective on local

authority archaeology in Scotland that only the pioneer could have provided.

With well over 60 significant publications to his name, Ian produced a huge range of literature: from leaflets and guide-books to specialist studies (particularly on Beaker burials and Bronze Age jet artefacts), but also including regional archaeological overviews and monographs on architecture. All were written with acute concern for the intended readership: an awareness that applied even to the short texts on his notice boards at field monuments. Two of his three general surveys have been republished: his *Exploring Scotland's Heritage: Grampian* (1986) as *Aberdeen and North-East Scotland* (1996); and *Gordon: an illustrated architectural guide* (1994) as *Aberdeenshire: Donside and Strathbogie* (2006). Both are quiet triumphs, like the unshowy John Smith buildings he so admired as an architectural historian. Co-written with his Aberdeenshire colleague, Moira Greig, *Grampian's Past: its archaeology from the air* (1996) showcased their aerial photographs of a range of historic buildings and archaeological sites. Despite worsening health, he was still actively writing in the months leading up to his death – including his contributions to the Marischal College project on *Beakers and Bodies* and the *Buildings of Scotland* volume on the North-East.

Ian's aerial photographs have already been mentioned; he was one of the first archaeologists in Scotland to take to the skies. Many new sites were discovered during his programmes of aerial survey over Grampian Region from 1977, including those undertaken to recover crop-marks in the fertile lowlands of the Laigh of Moray and elsewhere in the summer months, and other, upstanding, remains year-round on the upland moors. Flying in little Cessnas from Dyce and Fordoun gave Ian new scope to use the Olympus cameras he liked so much.

He also undertook fieldwork and excavation. His principal dig, with his wife Lekky, was in the testing environment of the Sculptor's Cave at Covesea on the Moray coast, in use from Late

Bronze Age to Pictish times. Menaced by metal-detecting, the cave was accessed during the excavation by way of memorably vertiginous scaffolding down the cliff. Ian and Lekky enhanced our understanding of this key site, teasing many further details from the deposits left untouched by its original excavator, the remarkable Sylvia Benton. Ian also rescued numerous Bronze Age burials, disturbed by quarrying, ploughing or new housing.

Beyond the North-East, Ian contributed much to the development of local authority archaeology as a significant component of Scottish archaeological endeavour. With Lorna Main, now of Stirling Council, and the late Bob Gourlay, he developed a network for the still-small band of local authority archaeologists, and was the first chair (from 1990 to 1993) of the Association of Regional and Islands Archaeologists, now ALGAO Scotland. He served too on the first council of the latter. He was also a key supporter of a number of initiatives involving local authority archaeological services in partnership with the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland. He had very definite views: in particular on what was properly local as opposed to central government business, and could, of course, on occasion disagree profoundly with policies and initiatives on heritage issues emanating from central government or elsewhere, whilst remaining good friends with the colleagues who enunciated them. He believed passionately in the importance of Scotland's archaeology, playing a central role in leaving it in a much healthier state than in the 1970s.

Ian also had a long and distinguished history of involvement with this Society, in particular serving as Chair of its North-East Section during the 1980s, as Editor of its *Proceedings* from 1983–90 and as a Vice-President from 1995 to 1998. From 1999 until only a few months before his death, he was also the influential Convener of its Research Committee. In this capacity he was co-organiser and subsequently co-editor (with

Gordon Barclay) of the proceedings of the highly successful international conference *Scotland in Ancient Europe*, a major review, promptly published in 2004, of the country's Neolithic and Earlier Bronze Age record which thoroughly explored Scotland's place in a wider continental context. As Research Committee Convener, he also ensured that the Society distributed wisely its limited funds for research.

After having served as Assistant Editor, Ian took over as Editor of the Antiquaries' *Proceedings* during a period of rapid change in scholarly publishing. At that time, the Society's revised policy on publication, which Ian had helped develop, sought to meet the challenges enunciated by Leslie Alcock, who contended that excavation reports needed to be primarily short, succinct and meaningful summary statements. The underpinning data required to be separate but available. The Society's answer to communicating this data was then microfiche, to be included with the published volumes. Ian was a strong supporter of the ideas which lay behind this vision.

Equally important was his role in commissioning review articles for the *Proceedings*, a novel but important development. Some of these papers have subsequently been recognised as significant academic contributions to the understanding of Scotland's past. The reviews of the Scottish Neolithic by Ian Kinnes, then at the British Museum, and of the Iron Age, by Richard Hingley, for example, were landmarks in the development of their particular fields. David Clarke has noted that, sadly, neither of these initiatives really survived Ian's editorship.

Throughout his career Ian maintained very high standards, and his work on behalf of this Society is symptomatic of that. David Clarke, his predecessor as Editor, remembers Ian rightly railing when excavation reports rejected for publication in the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, but returned to their authors with cogent suggestions for improvement, then appeared unaltered in other journals. An involvement in publication and

research underpinned by high standards such as those Ian espoused is the very life blood of our subject.

But Ian's interests, archaeological and other, were far from purely local. He could certainly quote from *Johnny Gibb o' Gushetneuk* and the poetry of George Bruce; but he also relished Jane Austen and P G Wodehouse. In his own field, his interests were even wider. He had an international reputation amongst Bronze Age specialists, and was, for some 20 years, Secretary of the Bronze Age Studies Group, where his duties extended beyond the routine to include shepherding – literally – its directionally-challenged president, Colin Burgess, on visits around Europe.



Ian's central interests in the Bronze Age (and indeed in the Chalcolithic – a concept on which he expounded in a recent conference) led him to many of his excavations in the North-East, including, beyond that at the Sculptor's Cave, Covesea, the important Beaker cemetery at Borrowstone, Aberdeenshire and a Cordoned Urn grave with faience beads at Findhorn, Moray. His excavation reports – many co-authored with Lekky and with Moira Greig, his colleague in the Aberdeenshire Archaeology Service – shine out for their intelligent, enquiring approach and their attention to detail. The meticulous style of inquiry he first developed during his undergraduate dissertation research also marks his work on Beaker pottery,

where he adapted Lanting and van der Waals's system to establish a regional typochronology for North-East Scotland, refining an approach he had already taken, in concert with Graham Ritchie, for the South-West of this country. The experience borne of this work, and of his 33 years' service as the Local Authority Archaeologist for Aberdeenshire, was put to good use in the advice Ian was able to give to the recent *Beakers and Bodies* project, undertaken by Neil Curtis in Marischal Museum. Similarly, much earlier in his career, the expertise which he gained from his study of prehistoric jetworking enriched the 1985 Edinburgh exhibition, *Symbols of Power at the Time of Stonehenge*, and its accompanying publication.

As a postgraduate student, Ian, together with Lekky and a small team, began excavation at the important Beaker domestic site at Rosinish on the east coast of Benbecula. Although his responsibilities in the North-East meant that he was never able to pursue this work quite as he would have liked, the interim accounts which he published were amongst the first to highlight the potential of Hebridean machair sites for the recovery of fine archaeological detail, such as the traces of ard-marks. This Benbecula work, again undertaken in a demanding setting – the team had to be taken to the site, with their equipment and supplies, by boat and left there for an extended period – was thus one of the underpinnings of the more recent surge of interest in the archaeology of the Western Isles.

Ian's awareness of Scotland's place in its wider, European setting was reinforced by his enthusiastic membership of the Bronze Age Studies Group. Through the contacts and friendships forged there, as Trevor Cowie has remarked, he was able to promote the prehistoric archaeology of Scotland to an international audience and conversely was able to apply the insights gained from its annual meetings to his own research – for example, a memorable visit to the archaeologically-rich cave system at Han in the Belgian Ardennes did much to inform his interpretation of the Sculptor's Cave.

But BASG also furnished other pleasures. The archaeological content of a meeting on Dartmoor was wonderful but tempered by the fact that the hotel bar closed *very* early. Ever resourceful, Ian and colleagues were obliged to spend many hours drinking miniatures that Derek Simpson extracted from the night porter at regular intervals. The BASG visit to Burgundy, which extended to the Mordant family wine-cellar in the Yonne, seems to have been equally memorable for both its archaeological and bibulous aspects.

Ian will be missed not only for his immense contribution to Scotland's archaeological and built heritage, but also for his great generosity of spirit, his gentleness, and his dry sense of humour. His encyclopaedic knowledge of the North-East was lightly borne, and he was prepared to share it with anyone. His dry but gentle wit came across best in his commentaries on the exploits of the BASG on their various international jaunts, and in his sharp observations of the derailing of overblown administrators. Beyond all this he relished much of life, from a glass of decent malt to his last trip to France, and he was a family man who took great pleasure in the achievements of his wife and beloved daughters, Bryony and Sunniva.

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