



Society of Antiquaries  
of **Scotland**

## The Scottish Antiquarian Tradition: Essays to mark the bicentenary of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland 1780-1980

Edited by A S Bell

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*Erratum*

In the original publication of *The Scottish Antiquarian Tradition* plate 4 'Sir George Steuart Mackenzie, 7th Bt, of Coul' was attributed to Sir John Watson Gordon. However it is now attributed to Sir Henry Raeburn.

## *In Piam Veterum Memoriam*

Angus Graham

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In 1935 I was suddenly plummeted down, as if by parachute, into the Secretaryship of the Ancient Monuments Commission of Scotland, a position close to the centre of contemporary Scottish archaeology. It was a drastic change from my immediately previous job, which had been concerned with large-scale forestry in Canada; but on recovering my breath I came to see a great deal, and at very close quarters, of the methods and personalities of the principal actors. Being now invited to write something for the Society's bicentenary volume, I have tried to marshal some memories of my early experiences, both as the Commission's secretary and as one of the honorary secretaries of the Society itself, thereby bringing down the scope of this collection of studies to within living memory. I hope that, as what I have to write is concerned with men, and not with the winds of antiquarian doctrine, they may not appear — to quote, I think, Poo-Bah — as 'a bald and unconvincing narrative'.

Scottish archaeology, at the time when I first came into it, was largely dominated by three outstanding figures — one of their enemies, indeed, was heard to say that it was owned by them in fee simple. These three were Sir George Macdonald and James Curle, the Romanists, and the latter's brother Alexander, enormously distinguished for work with the Commission and the Society, as Director of the Royal Scottish Museum, and numberless projects in the field. Underground opposition, possessing little actual power but vocally bitter, was fomented by John Graham Callander, Director of the National Museum of Antiquities, while trouble would also be expected from time to time from James Richardson, the Office of Works Inspector of Ancient Monuments. At the same time, archaeology of a totally different kind was growing up in Edinburgh University, intro-

duced there by Gordon Childe, appointed a few years earlier to the Abercromby Chair of Prehistory. Childe's eminence in the discipline was of course far above question, but he held no place in the Establishment's counsels on account no doubt of its fear of the winds of change, coupled with dislike for his Marxist politics and peculiar quirks of temperament. Episodes of antiquarian life in this uneasy period and later will be the more readily understood if read in this kind of context.

The first of the shades to rise in the steam of the seer's cauldron cannot be other than that of Sir George Macdonald. In 1935, as President, he held absolute power in the Society, and he had been appointed Chairman of the Ancient Monuments Commission a year before I arrived. He stood at the head of every conceivable tree, scholastic, antiquarian and official, and seemed able to come and go very much as he pleased among the seats of power. He once advised me that, in order to get anything done, one should go either to the man at the very top, who was able to bring about an earthquake, or else to whatever little dog's-body actually drafted the orders and could slip things through unobtrusively, but on no account to get involved with the middle ranks who specialised in delaying tactics. His K.C.B. approach could sometimes hold up matters of major policy — for example, in the matter of staff salaries he was apt to think that anyone who had started right at the bottom of a ladder was *ipso facto* a groundling, and ought to be content if he had mounted a modest number of rungs without looking for further advancement. But in combating official penny-wisdom in routine affairs he would put up a vicious fight, and with the greater chance of success as he was known to go easy on sensitive issues. He took enormous trouble to train me in Civil Service ways, and it was astonishing to see his stored experience in action — as he wrote, say, a longish and precise memorandum, straight off in longhand, without pause or correction. His writings were in fact models, as of a past master of English. At the same time he was well aware of the use that could sometimes be made of a vernacular expression to sharpen a point. 'It was like a witches' kitchen', he said to me once, after listening to a German broadcast of one of Hitler's rallies; or 'Ye may howk till ye hear the De'il hoastin', but ye'll no' find it', adapting the opinion of an early coal-pro prospector to discredit a project for Roman excavations in Fife.

In some quarters, however, he was feared and deeply hated, as his way with the inefficient had gained him a reputation for ruthlessness.

In particular, he had found the Commission in a state which fell far short of his standards, and had begun to sweep it out with a new and urgent broom. Much of the trouble had originated with my predecessor, Dr W. Mackay Mackenzie, a dedicated scholar, deeply learned in Scottish medieval history, of whom Vivian Galbraith, when Professor of History in Edinburgh, once said, 'That old man's erudition flabbergasts me'. But his learning seems to have left him high and dry when it came to the running of even a small department. He seemed to have seen no need to help or advise the Commissioners in formulating general policy; and he held that the reports of the outdoor staff should be printed more or less as they stood, without editorial polishing or shaking together — a strange doctrine for one whose first duty it was to produce learned publications. I gather that Sir George did chivvy him in a merciless way; at any rate his health broke down and he duly retired. I knew nothing of all this at the time, of course, but Sir George's enemies bubbled over with defamatory gossip, and in the office one could sometimes detect the faint burnt-powdery smell that hangs about after an explosion. I began to understand why an old Edinburgh friend had enquired anxiously how I was getting on; 'I was afraid for you,' he said, 'when I heard you were going to be under that man.' But I was able to assure him that I had fallen squarely on my feet and was finding Sir George a wise and helpful chief. Nor have I ever had reason to change this opinion. On the other hand I certainly admit that he might have been a dangerous enemy, and the painter Maurice Greiffenhagen evidently saw the same point — or why should a more or less neutral observer have remarked, after viewing his portrait, 'How cruel the hands look'? All this was typical of the way in which the antiquaries waged the war that I mentioned at the beginning of this paper.

It is interesting now to recall that R. G. Collingwood, who knew and admired Sir George, once expressed the opinion that strife among learned men was a sure sign of vigorous forward movement in whatever discipline was concerned.

In addition to the tightening of screws in administrative matters, Sir George would sometimes plan a bizarre *coup*, and one of these, which failed, remains in my memory. It concerned the building in Queen Street that housed, and still houses, the National Museum of Antiquities. This building, which was opened in 1891, was much too small and was also quite unsuited to the purposes of a modern museum. Many requests had been made for its reconstruction or

improvement, though so far without result; but when, at last, the Treasury showed some signs of a readiness to produce funds, Sir George caused the Society, which in those days managed the Museum, to reject the Government's offer, having, as it seemed, a more ambitious plan of his own. The possible content of this plan possesses no basis of fact; but the retailers of malicious gossip pointed to a certain very generous distiller of whisky, who had lately been giving large sums to archaeological projects, and alleged that he was to put up a round million pounds to pay for a brand-new Museum of unparalleled splendour while Sir George would obtain him a peerage as a *quid pro quo*. If so, however, Jeannie, in the words of the folk-song, 'keepit her bawbee', the proposed victim preferring a million pounds in the hand to a peerage in the bush. The Museum thus fell between two stools, and remained as we see it today.

Outstanding scholar as he was, Sir George plunged head-over-heels into the improvement of the Commission's Inventories. One of these, covering Orkney and Shetland, was well advanced at the time when I came on the scene; another, on the City of Edinburgh, was also in hand; and an ill-considered start had been made on the counties of Roxburgh, Peebles and Selkirk in the pathetic belief that these could be combined in a single convenient volume. In the event, they took up five volumes, the last of which only appeared more than thirty years later. This was the kind of approach that particularly annoyed Sir George — 'an unmethodical man', he stigmatised my unhappy predecessor. He read and amended all the typescript of Orkney and Shetland, and wrote an introduction to replace two drafts of mine, both rejected. I remember the air of defeat with which he once complained that he could think of no other way but mine of treating a certain point. This propensity I could sometimes turn to my own advantage, when any of the Commissioners — at least three of whom were taking part in the fieldwork — supplied an article for the Inventory in some quite unsuitable form; for while it is unpleasant to criticise one's colleagues for jargon and split infinitives, to do so with one's bosses is naturally awkward as well. To Sir George, however, such a *contretemps* was meat and drink, as his friends would cheerfully recognise. 'Don't I even get a mark for handwriting?' asked Alexander Curle, as he watched Sir George furiously blue-pencilling his manuscript as they crouched behind a dyke to shelter from the Shetland wind. But with enemies it was another matter. 'That man would rewrite *The Scotsman*,' one of them fumed; while another burst out with 'A dominie, and the son of a

dominie!' This latter jibe happened to be factually correct, as his father had been Rector of Ayr Academy and he himself, after ten years in the Department of Greek at Glasgow University, had joined the Scottish Education Department and had finished his career as its head.\*

He never let up, almost to the day of his death. When illness finally caught up with him, he used to call me to his house to discuss affairs in his bedroom; and it was only at the last, and in face of a peculiarly tricky problem, that he surrendered and told me to work up something in the office. Ian Richmond said, as we came out from his funeral service, 'The last of the great men.'

Of Alexander Curle I can write with pleasure and confidence, as he was a valued personal friend of long standing. I had first made his acquaintance as a very young man, when, having begun to take an interest in ancient monuments, I had wandered into the National Museum of Antiquities, of which he was then Director, to ask some amateurish questions. He received me in the kindest way, advised me what to read, and encouraged me to try my hand at some small excavation, perhaps a cairn which had been rifled by seekers for treasure. 'We've had enough of old Christison,' he said, 'going round the forts and measuring them up with his umbrella. We must have more excavation.' It must, of course, be recognised that excavation, as he saw it in those days, was largely a matter of securing a body of relics as examples of typology and dating; and studies of this kind he was admirably fitted to carry out, as he possessed what may be called a museum mind, trained and sharpened in an earlier phase of his career by contact with Joseph Anderson. Even his garden reflected this point of view, the greenhouse in particular containing whole battalions of small and inconspicuous plants, quite uninteresting to the layman, all lined up and ticketed like a case of fine flint arrowheads. He considered himself to have been lucky in his finds of significant objects, but in fact he had developed a considerable flair for detecting the best places to explore on an ancient site; patches of nettles, in particular, he recommended to the beginner's notice, as likely to indicate middens. His luckiest find of all was the great Roman treasure on Traprain Law — he was leaving the site one evening after the diggers had knocked off,

\* A detailed account of his achievements was published in *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, 74 (1939-40), 123 ff.

when a gleam of silver exposed in the loose soil of a half-dug cavity just happened to catch his eye.

Although I was out of archaeology for more than ten years, while living in Canada, we always maintained a correspondence and I saw him from time to time during holiday visits to Scotland. It was he who advised me of the vacancy on the Commission's staff when my predecessor retired; and after I had taken up duty I consistently valued his advice, as he had himself served as the secretary when the Commission was first appointed, in 1908, and consequently he knew all the ropes.

The fact of his appointment to that post, and at that date, calls for a comment here, as it marked a significant step in the progress of Scottish archaeology. Their Letters Patent instructed the Commissioners to make an inventory of the ancient monuments of Scotland of earlier date than 1707, leaving them free to go about their task in whatever manner they chose. This licence fortunately covered the appointment of a secretary, and here the Commissioners showed a pioneering spirit. Today it would seem natural to appoint some kind of archaeologist to an archaeological post, but this simple view did not necessarily apply in 1908—nor, for that matter, was the post necessarily regarded as being an archaeological one. The ordinary method of supplying a Commission with a secretary was to second a Civil Servant temporarily from a large Department, and this plan admittedly possesses several virtues; it ensures, for example, that the Commission's business is conducted in a regular manner, it gives a good man an opportunity to show his paces, and if the man is less than good it gives his Department a welcome relief from his presence. But these Commissioners boldly struck out on a new line, and appointed an outdoor man in the person of Curle. They emphasised the outdoor approach in one of their early minutes, which ruled that the secretary must 'visit each county in turn, with the object of personally inspecting each monument so as to satisfy [them] as to its true character and condition'. Their first survey, which was of Berwickshire, immediately showed what this could mean, as Curle, who was a tall and powerful man of splendid physique, succeeded in recording, single-handed, in a whirlwind campaign of three months, a total of over two hundred and fifty monuments, of which seventy were new discoveries. There used to be preserved in the office a small-scale Ordnance Survey map on which he had marked his daily bicycle-journeys, with lines of red-ink dots. Again, a passage in the Commissioners' Third Report, which accompanied the Caithness Inventory, records that the secretary 'conducted the survey of the



county of Caithness (whereof the greater part is desolate moorland, involving prolonged physical exertion) with indefatigable zeal'. It could have added, with truth, that on occasion he had even walked native stalkers to a standstill. Perfectly in character was the fact that, at the age of seventy-nine, he climbed Rubers Law to show me some Roman stonework, re-used in a dyke at a spot known only to himself.

At the time when we resumed effective personal contact he had lately retired from the Royal Scottish Museum, to the Directorship of which he had moved after only a few years at the National Museum of Antiquities. With his public career behind him, he now figured as a kind of unofficial arbiter of archaeological ideas, of subjects connected with the common life and manners of old Scottish society, and of questions of art and connoisseurship.\* By the end of his life he had contributed to the Society, as author or co-author, no fewer than forty-eight papers, on subjects ranging from the excavation of major archaeological sites to his collections of brass candlesticks. For me personally his support possessed particular value in the years following Sir George Macdonald's death, when the latter's successor in the Society's Presidency and in the Chairmanship of the Ancient Monuments Commission, Sir John Stirling-Maxwell, was cut down by a crippling stroke and I, as secretary of both bodies, found myself left in a considerably exposed position. Again, when the Commission was working, after the war, on the inventory of the county of Roxburgh, his inbred Borderer's knowledge of the country people's ways, combined with his affable approach, could sometimes produce useful information on local matters.

Much more detail would expand this sketch to an unacceptable length, but I cannot forbear to record his narrow escape, in company with Sir George and Lady Macdonald, from a dramatic death at the beginning of the Second World War. On the afternoon of the sixteenth of October 1939, the Macdonalds set out to have tea with him at his house in Barnton Avenue. Leaving their taxi at the gate, they were walking up the garden path, with its bed of the newly-introduced meconopsis poppies alongside, when there came a sudden roar overhead and the path received a hearty burst of machine-gun fire. 'Disgraceful,' said Lady Macdonald, 'there ought to be a law against it' —

\* A detailed account of his work and of his personal circumstances and tastes was published in *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, 88 (1954-6), 234 ff.

she thought it was the R.A.F. out for an afternoon's exercise, but in fact it was the Luftwaffe's raid on the Forth Bridge.

The remaining member of the Society's ruling triumvirate was James Curle, Alexander's elder brother and, like him, an Ancient Monuments Commissioner. I treat him here after Alexander for the reason that I knew him less well, and also saw less of him in the course of the Society's and the Commission's affairs, as he lived in Melrose, and only came to Edinburgh for meetings. His fame as a Romanist, based on his work at Newstead, is outside the scope of this memorial; and I remember him chiefly as a kind and cheerful host at Priorwood, when I happened to be stationed at Hawick during the First World War, and later at Harmony, a smaller Georgian house. Of the latter he remarked, when cooks and housekeepers vanished into the munitions factories in 1940, 'I shall be alone in the kitchen with a tin-opener.' In official business his advice was invariably wise and moderate; and I remember him saying to me once, *à propos* of the Commission's staffing, 'You must get some more education into this thing.'

Emeritus Professor T. H. Bryce had lately retired from the Chair of Anatomy at Glasgow when I joined the staff of the Ancient Monuments Commission, and he was then the leading authority on chambered tombs in all their aspects. His calibre may be judged by the facts that he was a Fellow of the Royal Society, and that Childe, in the preface to his *Prehistory of Scotland*, classes his work in prehistory with that of Geikie, Munro and Abercromby as having 'exercised a guiding influence all over the world'. His Fellowship of the Society dated from 1902, and he served from time to time as Council member and Vice-President; but my own contacts with him were brought about less by the Society's affairs than by those of the Commission, on which he had sat since its formation in 1908. When I took up duty as secretary, the survey of Orkney and Shetland was well under way, fresh work was being done on the great Orkney cairns, already known and recorded, and completely new types of cairn were coming to light in Shetland, particularly the so-called 'heel-shaped' type discovered by the Commission's investigator C. S. T. Calder. His expert opinion on these structures was thus urgently needed, and he responded by supplying a sheaf of reports for the prospective Shetland Inventory, composed on the strength of a vigorous campaign in the field. It seems a shame to have to admit that his reports on these monuments tended

to excessive length, and also contained some passages of strangely poor English; they almost blunted Sir George Macdonald's blue pencil, but he took it all in good part. He was, in fact, a friendly and charming old man. Alexander Curle once described him as a 'ladies' pet'. He lived alone, as a widower, in a large house in Peebles, where I often went to visit him on a Sunday afternoon. He must have been an artist *manqué*, as I remember vividly a set of water-colour diagrams, larger than life, of the internal apparatus of a rabbit.



- THE URN -

J.S.R.

Sir George Macdonald and Dr Graham Callander at a Council meeting, circa 1930; drawn by James S. Richardson.

A figure which bulked large on my horizon in the 1930s was that of John Graham Callander, Director of the Museum and an Ancient Monuments Commissioner. I knew him well, but now find it hard to write of him without falling into caricature, while at the same time producing a picture credible to the present generation. This difficulty is due to his having possessed some odd personal traits. His background was a farm in Aberdeenshire which incorporated a small distillery, the produce of which was said never to have reached the market, being all

required for consumption on the spot by the large family and its retainers. It is known that, in consequence, a certain retainer once lost his arm in the turnip-cutter. The place lay on the very margin of human habitation, with nothing beyond it but moorland, moss and quarries; and it amused Callander to describe himself as a 'yokel', and to tease intellectuals by speaking and acting in character. This attitude he combined with a rooted dislike of change, largely because he was still held fast by the spell of Joseph Anderson, who had dominated Scottish archaeology, greatly to its advantage, from 1864 until well into the twentieth century, and tended to take little interest in matters outside the Master's scope. For example, I once asked him the probable date of some object, and got told that 'Anderson said that there were no dates in prehistory, only periods'; or again, when I told him that I was finding large numbers of cultivation terraces which had not been reported previously, he replied, 'Aye, too daamned many'. It was not that he had any specific axe to grind in the matter of lynchets — he just recoiled from the idea of opening a new and tiresome window.

Another of Callander's foibles was a general dislike of anything English. For example, he utterly eschewed the Society of Antiquaries of London. In this he was probably influenced partly by what we now know as Scottish nationalism, partly by the impatience of the 'yokel' with external scholarship, and partly by the conservative's fear of such fresh ideas and methods as younger archaeologists from England might be thought likely to introduce. Childe, of course, ensconced close by in the University, was typically 'new' in this sense, and, however thoroughly Callander may have disliked Sir George Macdonald and the Curles, he certainly followed their example in cold-shouldering Childe. He was bitterly hostile to Childe's book *The Prehistory of Scotland*, which was published in 1935; and I well remember how, when he found in it a passage which said that five examples of some type of object existed, he exclaimed, in furious protest, 'It's daamnabable — there's siven!' On the other hand, in spite of his skill with pottery and stone implements, the 'yokel' who ignored scholarship and took no interest in the standards of high-flying Edinburgh society was not at all cordially accepted by his Establishment colleagues.

'But he's such a nice chap,' I once said to a pillar of conventional propriety; 'I don't think he is at all' came the slightly offended reply. However, his friends were fond of him, and after his death we missed his subversive impact on the strait-laced Edinburgh circle.

Gordon Childe's achievement as Abercromby Professor of Pre-historic Archaeology has, I believe, been criticised on the grounds that no active group, devoted to archaeological studies on up-to-date lines, grew up either in his Department or on its intellectual margin. As to whether this criticism is valid or not in strictly academic terms, I can naturally form no opinion, never having been one of his students; but I aver that personally, in the course of long association with Childe in archaeological fieldwork and reporting, I found him a most stimulating teacher and generous in dispensing rich stores of knowledge, to the enormous advantage of a pupil not greatly disturbed by his occasional fits of temperament. That the temperament existed cannot, of course, be denied, and it can well be explained by what is known of his early history. For instance, at some stage in the second decade of his life he spent two years in bed, with infantile paralysis; and on recovering from this found that he had lost half of one of his lungs from tuberculosis, never diagnosed until the long rest in bed had actually cured it. Hints have likewise been heard about incompatibility with older members of his family, while further emotional disturbance might well have been caused by his notable ugliness of face.

In view of the coolness that obtained between Childe and my chiefs in the Edinburgh archaeological establishment, at which I have done more than hint in earlier parts of this paper, it is not surprising that my official contacts with him in the earliest years of my service should have been only of the slightest. I knew him, naturally, in the ordinary social course, and found him most friendly and agreeable, but although he was one of the Society's 'Secretaries for Foreign Correspondence', I do not remember him attending meetings of the Council, nor was he, at that time, an Ancient Monuments Commissioner. It was, in fact, the question of his appointment as a Commissioner that first brought him urgently to my official notice.

Callander, as I have said, died in 1938, and Sir George arranged that the vacancy so created should be filled by R. W. Fairlie, the leading authority on Scottish mediaeval buildings, as our projected work in the old city of Edinburgh called for the best architectural advice obtainable. However, the news of this appointment elicited a furious letter to Sir George from Childe, demanding his own appointment in violent terms. I now forget the actual wording of the letter, but do recall that another of the Commissioners, a doctor, murmured the word 'paranoia'. Sir George, though deeply incensed, replied in a soothingly courteous Whitehall tone, assuring Childe that he would have been

*hors concours* under normal circumstances, but pointing to the Commission's need of an architect-member. In this way the lightning was deflected, and Childe quietly appointed to the next vacancy.

Whether as a result of this antic or on general grounds, Sir George's personal view of Childe was jaundiced. For example, when security rules were being tightened up just before the beginning of the war, some archaeological matter came into notice which had a security aspect, but which I thought ought to be notified both to Childe and to O. G. S. Crawford, then Archaeology Officer to the Ordnance Survey. I duly consulted Sir George, who agreed to informing Crawford but not Childe. 'But if Crawford, why not Childe?' I asked; 'they're both Communists.' 'Yes,' he replied, 'but Crawford's not an ass.'

It was during the war that I really discovered Childe. By 1943 the situation had changed materially — two of his chief opponents, Sir George and Callander, were both dead; Alexander Curle had come round to his side, won over by a candid apology for some absurd insult, and Childe himself was safely installed as a Commissioner. By this time a new problem had come up, that of protecting ancient monuments from damage by troops in training — for which purpose large areas of land had been earmarked in the Highlands and in other scantily populated regions. It was the antics of some Polish artillery that first brought the matter to notice, when it cheerfully shelled an important chambered cairn conspicuously set on a hill-top. Protests by Society or Commission, and well-meaning general orders by Scottish Command, seemed unlikely to have much effect, so it was decided to forestall damage by a quick survey of all unrecorded monuments in the areas in question. Childe volunteered to conduct the survey himself, and I was detailed to drive him about in my car and to act as his assistant and secretary. We were thus brought into close practical partnership over periods of weeks at a time.

My recollection of the man as I saw him in the course of those tours remains extremely vivid, and relates in the main to two aspects of his character. In the first, and less important, place was the unstable temperament which showed itself from time to time. Wartime conditions in the north were apt to give occasion for such outbreaks, as the whole country north of Inverness was named as a security area and the police were consequently more in evidence there than elsewhere. Again, as the local economy was geared to sheep-farms, deer-forests and grouse-moors, the doings of lairds and the rights of property in general may have bulked unusually large. To Childe, of course, as an

emotionally dedicated Communist, lairds and the police were *bêtes-noires*, with suspicion of most forms of authority thrown in for good measure. I remember very well how once, when we were based at Dingwall, he got the idea that his mail was being secretly opened, and spent a whole day in the train travelling to Kingussie and back in order to post a certain letter outside the security zone. And then there was the dreadful day when we walked into the path of a grouse-drive, and were vigorously rebuked by the head keeper whose careful arrangements we had nullified. It was the laird, however, rather than the keeper who was deemed the villain here, for practising upper-class sports and for forcing a supposedly proletarian servant into capitalist ways through fear of losing his job.

It was from the second group of characteristics, however, that Childe's true value came out, and here I record with gratitude the example that he set to all followers of the archaeological discipline and the lessons that I believe I was personally able to learn. First, perhaps, came an unremitting pertinacity in the face of material obstacles — he would work for long hours in the open, undiscouraged by weather or bad going, and ignoring some physical handicaps which seemed to have persisted from his early infantile paralysis. Nor would he relax at the end of quite a gruelling day — I once saw him come in, tired out, at about half-past five, and proceed to write up his day's notes on the strength of four glasses of milk laced with rum. A bad draughtsman, content with a schoolchild's ruler and compasses and dipping an ordinary pen into the hotel's inkpot, he would yet produce simple plans which at least illustrated his points. In the field he could call on a powerful visual memory and vast practical experience, with the result that I found myself receiving, as it were, a course of personal tuition in stone circles, earthworks and forts. And behind all the points of detail there lay the influence of a logical scheme, which widened the whole of the prehistoric horizon.

Finally, in assessing the full debt that the Society owes to Childe, I recall how he came to the rescue in 1944, when Arthur Edwards's sudden death left the Museum without a director and the *Proceedings* without an editor. He generously assumed responsibility for care of the Museum until a regular appointment could be made at the end of the war.

One of his *obiter dicta*: 'Typology is the last refuge of a second-rate mind.'

So far I have written of Fellows who have enhanced the Society's

fame by their work as archaeologists and scholars, but must end with a note on one who gave equal service in the field of practical affairs. This was Sir John Stirling-Maxwell, who became a Fellow in 1892 and was our President from 1940 to 1945. Even the most cursory record of Sir John's career gives a picture of one who excelled in public spirit and was devoted to the common welfare. Material evidence of this spirit can be found in his stained glass in Glasgow Cathedral, in his provision for the handing-over of Pollok to the citizens of Glasgow, and in experiments in the afforestation of high-lying peaty moorland which he made on his estate at Corrour long before such matters began to be considered by the State. Knighthood of the Thistle and honorary degrees from three Scottish universities are pledges of his public standing; and further, at one time or another, he served as a Member of Parliament; as Chairman of public bodies — the Forestry Commission, the Ancient Monuments and Fine Arts Commissions of Scotland, and the Scottish Ancient Monuments Boards — and also as a Trustee of the National Galleries of Scotland and as President of this Society. The scope of his unofficial interests is likewise shown by his honorary connection with the chief bodies concerned with art and architecture, and by an admirable book on an architectural subject, *The Shrines and Homes of Scotland*.

It is, however, his service to the Society as President that calls for record here. The Presidency falling vacant on the death in 1940 of Sir George Macdonald, Sir John was elected in his place at that year's anniversary meeting. The result was welcomed by everyone, as he was a man who radiated charm and warm personal interest in colleagues and subordinates. This was particularly true in my own case, as I had known him for many years, since the days when I had been employed by the Forestry Commission, and I greatly valued his friendship. It was typical of his kindly approach that, after the first meeting of the Commission at which I functioned as Secretary, he made a small joke about a book which I had just had published, and asked whether my hero was real or whether I had invented him.

At the time of his election he was abroad, and known to be visiting South Africa. Hopes were gaily expressed that he would get home without being torpedoed, and would take up his functions shortly. After his return, however, a certain vagueness seemed to attach to news of him; then it began to be rumoured that he was seriously ill, and in the end we were told that he had had a devastating stroke and was wholly incapacitated for business. This disaster affected not only the



Society but also the Ancient Monuments Commission, of which he had been appointed Chairman — again replacing Sir George. The war was now hotting up, and it seemed that nothing could be done, so both bodies had to put up with administrative makeshifts and wait to see what would happen. Then came the surprising news that Sir John had partially recovered, and would be able to conduct the next meeting of the Society's Council; in due course he came over from Pollok in the hands of a nurse, and presided at the meeting slumped helplessly in a skew-wise posture in a wheeled chair. Only his right hand would move, permitting him to sign letters and minutes.

That meeting set the general form of our subsequent procedure, and to it he persistently stuck throughout the five years of his Presidency, overcoming, in a devotion to duty fired by the urgencies of war-time, disabilities which would certainly have crushed anyone less totally committed. Moreover, handicapped or not, he carried his Presidency through with perfect success, his prestige being such that even the highest authorities found it impossible to ignore him.

It is therefore proper for the Society, in celebrating the memory of great figures of the past, to think not only of its scholars and archaeologists but also of one who cared for its practical interests with such outstanding fidelity and courage.