

Obituary

Anne S Robertson

Professor Anne Robertson who died on 4 October 1997 at the age of 87 was an archaeologist and numismatist of international repute. From the moment of graduation in 1932 until her retirement in 1975 she was associated with the Hunterian Museum at the University of Glasgow, and its world-famous Hunter Coin Cabinet. Throughout her long and active life she maintained high standards in scholarship and museum curation, and her passing has removed a final link with figures such as Sir George Macdonald, James Curle and S N Miller.

Anne Strachan Robertson was born and educated in Glasgow, graduating Master of Arts with Honours in Classics in 1932. Her enthusiasm for Roman history and archaeology and her attention to minute detail were already noticeable as an undergraduate. S N Miller, lecturer in



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Roman History, then newly appointed Honorary Curator of the Roman Collections at the Hunterian Museum, saw her as ideally suited to Museum work, in particular to the task of ordering and cataloguing the archaeological and ethnographic collections at the Museum, the former now including material from his own excavations at the Roman forts of Balmuildy and Old Kilpatrick, then still packed in boxes. It was perhaps Miller who brought her to the attention of Sir George Macdonald, Honorary Curator of the Hunter Coin Cabinet, as especially suited also to working with coins. A university scholarship allowed her to spend part of the session 1932–3 travelling to visit museum collections elsewhere in the United Kingdom. In 1933–4 she studied for a second MA, this time in Archaeology, at University College London, working with Sir Mortimer Wheeler; she participated in Wheeler's excavations at Maiden Castle. At the same time she gained valuable experience at the Coins and Medals Department of the British Museum. Many of her earliest publications in *Numismatic Chronicle* relate to coin hoards from Roman sites in Britain, a subject that was to remain dear to her to the end of her life. Soon she was back in Glasgow, appointed Bellahouston Scholar and again working at the Hunterian. She became a permanent member of Glasgow University staff in 1938–9; for many years her salary was paid from, or augmented by, the Dalrymple Archaeological Fund of the Glasgow Archaeological Society, administered by the University. In consequence she continued to give regular Dalrymple lectures until the 1960s.

She quickly put her archaeological training to good use, beginning in 1937 a long series of excavations, interrupted by the Second World War, at Castledykes Roman fort near Lanark, which continued until 1955 and which established periods of both Flavian and Antonine occupation at this important site. Overlapping with this work was a series of 'rescue' excavations at Duntocher on the Antonine Wall (1947–51), where part of the fort was threatened by housing development. During the Second World War she continued with cataloguing, and gave lectures to service personnel on archaeology and Scottish history. At the same time she was working quietly on a massive catalogue of *The Roman Imperial Coins in the Hunter Coin Cabinet, University of Glasgow*, which appeared in five volumes between 1962 and 1982, and must be considered her chief scholarly contribution. She found time also to complete a volume in the series *Sylloge of Coins of the British Isles* (1961), published by the British Academy, devoted to Anglo-Saxon coins in the University of Glasgow collection. The writer played a small part in the preparation of later volumes of *Roman Imperial Coins*, in particular weighing coins for Volume 3 (published in 1977), and observed her at work in the Cabinet on a daily basis over many months. As the compiler of any catalogue knows well, such work needs patient attention to detail, intense concentration, and constitutes a strain on the eyesight, out of all proportion to the length of the published work. The five volumes described and listed some 12,000 coins, accompanied by carefully prepared photographic plates. In succession to Sir George Macdonald, she compiled decennial surveys of Roman coins found in Scotland, published in these *Proceedings*; see *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 84 (1949–50), 137–69; 94 (1960–1), 133–83; 103 (1970–1), 113–68; 113 (1983), 405–38. The task has now been assumed by Dr J D Bateson, latterly in partnership with N M McQ Holmes. Her numismatic achievement was widely recognized, for example by the award of the Medal of the Royal Numismatic Society (1964). She gained the greatest pleasure from visits to the American Numismatic Society in New York, where she was awarded the Huntington Medal (1970).

She divided her working day at the Hunterian between mornings in the Coin Cabinet and afternoons devoted to more general museum administration and archaeological matters. Her routine was precise, and not easily interrupted; not a moment was wasted. Her numismatic and archaeological interests were often combined, as in her lengthy study of 'The Romans in North

Britain: the Coin Evidence', published in the multi-volume *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, II.3 (1975), 364–426, and in a paper updating earlier surveys by James Curle, with the title 'Roman Finds from non-Roman Sites in Scotland', subtitled 'More Roman "Drift" in Caledonia', published in the inaugural volume of the journal *Britannia* (1970), 198–225.

She maintained a regular watch and ward along the Antonine Wall, at a time when others paid it scant attention. In 1960, at the invitation of the Glasgow Archaeological Society, she compiled a brief handbook and guide to the surviving remains, subsequently reprinted with minor modifications and still available in its sixth printing. She gained nothing financially from this, and indeed would have thought it strange to do so; indeed she frequently subsidized publications from her own resources, the money stated as coming from an 'anonymous benefactor'. For many enthusiasts this handbook was their first introduction to the Roman frontier between Forth and Clyde. In 1956 she prepared a cine-film of the Wall, in which two members of the Glasgow Archaeological Society traversed its length and inspected the surviving remains, a unique record at a fixed date. She organized an annual field excursion to the Antonine Wall, which sometimes culminated in tea at her country cottage near Kilsyth.

As an excavator she remained active in the field for over 40 years, a remarkable record. Between 1948 and 1973 she was Secretary of the Scottish Field School of Archaeology, and regularly Director of its training excavations, first at Castledykes, then at Birrens in Dumfriesshire, between 1962 and 1967, and at Cardean in Angus, from 1968 until 1973, the work continuing thereafter under the auspices of the Hunterian Museum until 1975; her final operations in the field were again at Duntocher in 1977–8. For students of the Field School, these excavations provided rigorous training in a very formal setting, both bringing home the need for an organized approach to the management of an excavation, and providing a firm grounding in the techniques which had to be deployed to maximize the information obtained. Several hundred students, most drawn from Scottish Universities (including the writer from 1966 onwards), supplemented by school pupils and 'grown-ups', participated over the years; she greatly impressed the students newly gathered on the first night of each season by knowing everyone's name and their background. A goodly number now hold professional posts (or indeed have retired from them) in universities, museums, government agencies or work as archaeological specialists. Each season of excavation was recorded on cine-films which were the highlight of annual reunions held on the Saturday before Christmas each year; the writer often had the anxious task of operating the projector.

She took care to make the results of her work available to the wider community, with the publication of *An Antonine Fort: Golden Hill, Duntocher* (1957), *The Roman Fort at Castledykes* (1964), and *Birrens (Blatobulgium)* (1975). Of her major archaeological projects only Cardean remains unpublished at her death; but the report is largely complete, and many specialist contributions had been received. Her archaeological and numismatic papers, and many books, together with the cine-films of her excavations, were recently presented to the Hunterian Museum by the Trustees of the Church of Scotland, to whom the bulk of her estate was bequeathed. She directed, or arranged for others to supervise, many small excavations, often along the line of the Antonine Wall, sometimes with a workforce of school pupils, and at watch towers on the Gask Ridge Roman 'frontier' in Perthshire.

The Glasgow Archaeological Society formed a focus for her attentions for 60 years. She was Vice-President from 1945 until 1954, and then President from 1954 to 1957. Her time as President included the Society's centenary celebrations in the session 1956–7, culminating in a close-packed sequence of receptions, lectures and excursions in August 1957, which marked the 'centenary week'. Her Presidential Address considered the role of the Society in the developing

knowledge of Roman Scotland, 1856–1956. Subsequently her strong sense of duty prompted a return to service in 1965 as one of the Society's Honorary Secretaries, a post she continued to hold until 1972. To mark her retirement from the Hunterian Museum in 1975, the Society issued a volume of the *Glasgow Archaeological Journal* devoted to studies in her honour, by friends and colleagues. She was elected an Honorary Member of the Society in the following year.

Her service to this Society was no less impressive. In 1946 she became a member of the Council; incredibly it might seem now, she was the first woman to be elected. From 1949 until 1962 she was the Secretary responsible for Foreign Correspondence, and thereafter, until 1982, an *ex officio* member of Council as representative on the Board of Trustees of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland. She also had particularly close links with the Glasgow and West of Scotland Numismatic Society, of which she held the first membership card, and was Honorary President at the time of her death.

She was active far beyond Glasgow, before and after her retirement, lecturing frequently to archaeological and heritage groups, taking a special interest in fledgeling societies, in the projects and activities of school pupils, and in local initiatives. For example, she prepared a short account of 'The Antonine wall through the Ages from Balmuldy to Hutcheson Hill' (ie that part of it within the then Bearsden & Milngavie District) to coincide with the exhibition *Remains to be Seen*, at the Lillie Art Gallery, Milngavie (1988). She was Honorary Secretary of the Scottish Group of the CBA (1959–61) and in later years she sponsored the Robertson Awards, presented under the auspices of its successor CBA Scotland (subsequently CSA), to reward a variety of archaeological endeavour, particularly by its younger members. She was a patron of the Trimontium Trust (Newstead) from its foundation in 1988. She frequently attended the International Numismatic Congresses, and the International Congresses of Roman Frontier Studies, and was a speaker at the latter's inaugural meeting, organized by Professor Eric Birley, at Durham in 1949. She was a clear and effective lecturer, speaking informatively for an hour without notes. The technique was especially effective at the Field School and when addressing local societies; it seemed to work less well in the more formal settings of lectures to undergraduates, with whom she was always ill at ease.

In an age when professional archaeologists were a small community, she served frequently on the councils, committees or governing bodies of various organizations at a local and national level. She was a member of the Ancient Monuments Board for Scotland for an extended period in the 1960s and 1970s and a member of its Rescue Committee. She became a Fellow of the Royal Numismatic Society (1937), of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland (1941), of the Society of Antiquaries of London (1958) of the Museums Association (1958), and was among the first arts-based Fellows elected to the Royal Society of Edinburgh (1975); she was also a Council Member of the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies (1962–5 and 1966–9) and later one of its Honorary Vice-Presidents. Academic honours came her way, though perhaps somewhat belatedly. In 1965 she was awarded a D.Litt by the University of Glasgow in recognition of her publications. She was made a Reader in Roman Archaeology in 1964, and Professor of Roman Archaeology, one of the first women to be given professorial rank at Glasgow University, in 1974, a year before her retirement.

An extremely shy and very private person, not always at ease in large gatherings, she expected the highest standards both from herself and from immediate colleagues. It is easy for present-day archaeologists to forget that in the 1930s, few professionals were in post, either in museums, government agencies or in the field. In a male-dominated profession, she was compelled to form her own judgements on a wide range of scholarly topics and rely on them for want of colleagues with whom to share them. The nature of her post, and perhaps her own personality,

did not lead her to attract pupils in the normal way; but among her Glasgow students were the distinguished numismatists Robert Carson, later Keeper of Coins and Medals at the British Museum, and Marion Archibald, later Assistant Keeper there. Anne Robertson's job-title changed several times, but in latter years it was 'Keeper of the Cultural Collections and of the Hunter Coin Cabinet'. Despite a common belief to the contrary, she was never Keeper or Director of the Museum as a whole; but to many she was the Museum's public face and the person most associated with it: a letter once arrived at the Museum addressed to 'Dr Anne Hunter'. As a correspondent her neat handwriting was instantly recognizable, and it shone forth both in the immaculately compiled museum accessions-ledgers and in the registration-numbering applied to many thousands of artefacts in the archaeological and ethnographic collections.

At about the time of her retirement she moved to a detached bungalow in Bearsden, a few yards south of the Antonine Wall, and so just within the Roman Empire. Here she worked for many years on her final work, *Romano-British Coins Hoards*, a massive undertaking unfortunately long delayed in the press, through no fault of her own; publication is now imminent but it is sad that she herself did not live to see the resulting volume. She maintained her strong association with the Church of Scotland and did unheralded work for the Samaritans. She never married, and remained close to her three sisters, one of whom she had recently nursed through a protracted final illness, and to their children and grandchildren.

Lawrence Keppie