

Obituary

Audrey Shore Henshall, OBE MA FSA HonFSAScot

11 April 1927 – 14 December 2021

With the death of Audrey Henshall on 14 December 2021, at the age of 94, the Scottish archaeological community lost one of its last links with the decade after the end of the Second World War and, throughout a long and varied career, she retained much of the spirit of that period. Audrey was born on 11 April 1927, in Oldham, Lancashire, to Edward and Marjory Henshall. Her father was a master builder and owner of a furniture factory. An only child, Audrey attended Merchant Taylors' Girls' School, Crosby which, during the Second World War, because of its proximity to Liverpool, was evacuated to Wales. The experience of boarding away from home was something she later recalled that she rather enjoyed. After leaving school she moved to Scotland to read archaeology at the University of Edinburgh under the tutelage of Professor Stuart Piggott, graduating with an MA in 1949, and she was to remain in Edinburgh for the rest of her life.

As an undergraduate her academic abilities were clearly recognised and, shortly after graduation, she returned to the Department of Archaeology, having been appointed a Research Fellow under the direction of Piggott. He proposed she should study Neolithic burial monuments and, by 1951, she had begun work on her pioneering two-part study of Scottish chambered tombs (*The Chambered Tombs of Scotland*, 1963 and 1972), which was to occupy much of her time over the following 20 years.

Although fieldwork for the chambered tombs volumes had begun in the early 1950s, completion was interrupted by Audrey's appointment in 1952 to a post as an Assistant Curator at the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland. It is



Audrey Henshall at Kirk Yetholm in September 2004.
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a tribute to her tenacity that for a further decade the survey proceeded as time allowed from her official duties along with generous support provided by the museum itself.

Single-handed survey can be a lonely pursuit but Audrey was ably assisted by a number of professional and amateur colleagues, establishing a number of long-term personal friendships. In addition, she received support from several institutions, including members of staff at the Archaeology Division of the Ordnance Survey, the

Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, the Department of the Environment (now Historic Environment Scotland), the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, and the Carnegie Trust. Her debt to these individuals and institutions is amply recorded in the prefaces to the two volumes.

In the Introduction to the first volume, covering Shetland, Orkney and the north and east of Scotland as far south as Kincardineshire, she records that the fieldwork was completed in September 1959 with the manuscript ready by January 1960, and it was handsomely published by Edinburgh University Press in 1963. The second volume of *Chambered Tombs*, completing the coverage of western and southern Scotland, was published in 1972. Since the early 1950s developments in Neolithic studies were advancing with increasing speed, particularly as a result of radiocarbon dating and the realisation of the complexity in the constructional history of the mounds surrounding the tombs, all of which posed what appeared to Audrey as a number of then irresolvable chronological problems for the dating and history of the monuments. Nevertheless, the second volume followed the pattern of the first with meticulous plans, as well as a full record of the contents of the tombs. Also included were a catalogue and drawings of the finds from the tombs, as might be expected from someone with a museum background.

Between 1989 and 2001 Audrey produced four regional volumes revising her earlier works and adding numerous newly identified tombs to the ever-growing list of monuments. The first two (*Orkney* 1989 and *Caithness* 1991) were prepared in conjunction with J L Davidson, while with the two final volumes (*Sutherland*, 1995 and *The Central Highlands*, 2001), she was assisted by Graham Ritchie. Taken together, the six volumes provide the most comprehensive studies of any class of Scottish prehistoric monuments, earning her an international reputation for scholarship. Nearly 60 years on from the publication of the first volume of *Chambered Tombs*, Audrey's work is still the starting point for the study of the monuments, in spite of the advances

made in the understanding of the complexities of the structures, the reconsideration of typological approaches, and a wealth of radiocarbon dates.

Work at the museum gave Audrey the opportunity to develop other interests, particularly prehistoric and later textiles, and her earliest published paper was an assessment of textile and weaving appliances in Britain (*Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*, vol 16, 1950). This was an interest, a friend has suggested, that may date from her wartime schooldays. Over the following 67 years Audrey wrote or contributed to some 64 publications.

The interest Audrey had developed by the inclusion of the finds from chambered tombs while preparing her first two major volumes led, in later years, to her becoming an acknowledged expert in Scottish Neolithic and Bronze Age pottery. As such, she became the specialist of choice for generations of excavators to turn to for prehistoric pottery reports and, in conjunction with the excavators, she published numerous analyses of Scottish Neolithic pottery assemblages, as well as Bronze Age pottery and associated artefacts, particularly early metal daggers. Besides her published work on pottery, she was ever-willing to offer the benefits of her expertise to those who sought it.

Committee work was not an aspect of life that Audrey relished and she never held any positions on major public bodies, a rare exception occurring in the late 1960s when she was persuaded to become a founder member of the Scottish Archaeological Forum and delivered a significant paper to their annual conference; the subsequent volume was published in 1970. A frequent contributor at conferences, she was also a regular lecturer at the University of Edinburgh's adult education courses, fondly remembered by her students.

Audrey continued working at the National Museum of Antiquities throughout the 1950s and rose to become Assistant Keeper in 1960 under the Directorship of Robert Stevenson, a post she occupied until her retirement in 1971. During her last year at the museum, she was appointed Assistant Secretary to the Society of Antiquaries

of Scotland, having been a Fellow since the 1950s. This post allowed her to continue her close association with the Museum, as the Society's office then lay between the Director's office and the Museum Library.

As Assistant Secretary to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, she was responsible for the smooth operation of the Society's day-to-day affairs, and for acting as the Society's Librarian. This was no mean task as it involved running the office, ordering papers for meetings, and organising the various conferences and receptions – her patience, tact and tenacity ensured that all these projects progressed smoothly. The early 1970s was a busy period for the Society with the rapid expansion of professional archaeology in Scotland. At this time, and with the financial support of the Scottish Development Department (SDD), Audrey underpinned the Society's efforts in establishing the Archaeological Field Survey Team (based at RCAHMS), the Urban Excavation Unit, and the Aberdeen Archaeology Unit. These initiatives, in addition to her routine responsibilities, added greatly to the workload of the Assistant Secretary's post and marked the beginning of a more proactive role for the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

Following Audrey's retirement as Assistant Secretary to the Society in 1986, she was rewarded for her years of devoted service by being elected an Honorary Fellow in 1987. Other honours followed: in 1992 she was awarded an OBE for her services to archaeology; while in 2016 she was presented with the Society's Dorothy Marshall Medal, which, quoting from the Society's official citation, was 'for someone who had made an outstanding contribution to Scottish archaeological work'. On a more personal note, in 1992 she was presented with a Festschrift, appropriately entitled *Vessels for the Ancestors*, compiled by her peers in recognition of her scholarship.

Although her archaeological activities in the field were primarily concerned with survey, Audrey was also involved in a limited number of excavations. Early in her career she took an interest in long cist cemeteries, particularly those in the Lothians. In the 1950s she worked with

Margaret Stewart on the unusual chambered cairn of Clach na Tiompan, in Upper Glen Almond, Perthshire, and in the 1960s with Jim Wallace on the chambered tomb at Embo, Sutherland. In a departure from her normal focus on Scotland, she carried out a campaign of survey and excavation of chambered tombs on the Isle of Man. The uncharacteristic delay in the publication of this work (2017), which had been undertaken in the late 1960s and 1970s, marked Audrey's last formal occasion, when she was presented, surrounded by a small group of friends in the nursing home where she spent her last years, with a copy of the report by Francis Lynch who, together with P Davey, had edited the various strands of the work into a handsome volume.

Throughout her life Audrey maintained a wide circle of friends in Britain and abroad. Although never one to make a fuss, she enjoyed a party to celebrate notable events in her life with her friends and colleagues and, on rare occasions, was even known to take to the dance floor for a reel or a jig. She was a keen gardener and was particularly pleased with the produce from her kitchen garden at her house off Colinton Road, Edinburgh, while the small but carefully tended ornamental garden in her later home in Findhorn Place was delightful, and it was in these homes that she cared for her widowed mother and aunt in their declining years.

Audrey was an intrepid traveller both in Europe and farther afield. These trips were normally made in the company of a variety of friends or to visit friends who lived abroad. Even before she retired from the museum she had been part of an expedition with John Dunbar (later to be Secretary of RCAHMS) and William Boal (SDD) to study architectural monuments in Cilicia. In later years, she enjoyed a memorable holiday in the Northern Territories of Australia, where one day she and her companions were crammed into a small plane and taken on a somewhat hair-raising flight to visit an offshore island. On another occasion, on the advice of an acquaintance, she flew to Turkey to see the wild paeonies in flower, only to find that she was there at the wrong time of year.

Besides her interest in gardening, Audrey was also a keen ornithologist and was a loyal supporter of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. The passion for birds, however, was not always paramount, and once, when staying with friends in Nethy Bridge, she was taken to see a rare pair of grebes; instead, she was more intent on inspecting an adjacent chambered tomb, much to the frustration of her hosts.

Audrey's Christian faith played a central role in her life. She was a devoted member of the congregation at the Episcopal Church of Christ Church, Morningside, Edinburgh. It was there that we met for her funeral service; a service which she had meticulously planned herself,

incorporating the most traditional of hymns sung to well-known melodies with a moving eulogy given by a friend whom she had known since the 1960s.

Stuart Piggott's closing remarks in his Foreword to the first volume of *The Chambered Tombs of Scotland* are a fitting tribute to Audrey's professional career as a whole: 'a major contribution, of solid and enduring worth, to British pre-historic studies'.

In preparing this obituary I am grateful for the help given by David Breeze, Simon Gilmour, Susie Jackson, Rosemary Meldrum and Denys Pringle.

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