

## MEMOIRS.

## JAMES CURLE.

James Curle was the elder son of the well-known Melrose lawyer, Mr Alexander Curle, who was in turn the son of Sir Walter Scott's local factor and agent. He was educated at Fettes College and Edinburgh University, and it was in Edinburgh that he received his legal training. He then joined his father in practice at Melrose, and in course of time became himself the senior partner in the family firm of Curle and Erskine. It is not, then, surprising that one whose grandfather had been in close connection with Sir Walter Scott, the great Border antiquary of his day, and whose father had inherited a love for antiquity, should have been bred to archæological interests, like his even more versatile brother, Dr Alexander Curle, who is still happily with us. And while others will praise James Curle's geniality and kindness, his deep love for his native Melrose and for his country, his sagacity and acumen, his zeal for public service and his skill as an administrator, it is the present writer's privilege, as an old friend and admirer, to recall his place and standing in the archæological studies for which this Society most esteemed him.

His connection with archæological exploration and field-work first began after he had been elected a Fellow of this Society in 1899. His account of the brochs at Bow and Torwoodlee, which he contributed to the Society's *Proceedings*, still holds its place as the basic description of two of the most remarkable early monuments of the Lowlands; and it was in following these and kindred researches that James Curle and his brother came first to work with Sir George Macdonald and formed with him the Big Three of Scottish archæology. It may fairly be said that in the hands of that trio the study of ancient Scotland first became a comparative science, wherein all learning and all possibilities were ransacked for every item of information which could shed light upon local and immediate phenomena. It would, indeed, be difficult to estimate how much the work of each owed to the others, so intimate were their exchanges of views and so frequent their contacts; and it is no detraction from the two Curles to say that the standard in industry and breadth of learning was set by Sir George, who showed the whole world how first-class scholarship and humane learning could be combined with a busy administrator's life. Together, the three were to go from strength to strength, until the study of Roman Scotland in particular (wherein we must not forget Alexander Curle's work upon the great hill-fort of Traprain Law and its astonishing hoard of late Roman silver plate) took entirely new shape in their hands.

James Curle's share in the work was of particular significance and

distinction, and it was a matter of peculiar good fortune that it should have found a field of activity at his very doorstep. During the winter of 1904-5, ploughing at Newstead, in the Gutter-flat field, disclosed the presence of Roman buildings; and from February 1905 until May 1909, and again from December 1909 until September 1910, the Roman fort of *Trimontium*, long lost to knowledge, was investigated in detail. To understand the work aright, we must bear in mind the state of contemporary excavation of Roman forts. Of the two treatises then current, describing respectively Housesteads on Hadrian's Wall and Gellygaer in South Wales, one was in print and the other in preparation. At Gellygaer, except in the bath-house, only one period of structures was examined, albeit with exceptional ability and attention to detail. Housesteads, as we now know, must have exhibited four structural periods: but its excavator, like others before him, either went straight for the earliest coherent phase of the building under examination, chiefly ignoring other remains, or fused the remains of different periods into one plan, clear in general outline but hopelessly entangled in detail. James Curle would have none of this. He succeeded in distinguishing at Newstead no less than five successive structural phases, a feat which, having regard to the very reduced condition of the remains, must still excite our highest admiration. His claim that two of these were Flavian and three Antonine may well prove correct, doubts having been expressed only about the assignation of the third. When conditions permit, a long cross-section of the site, to check results, is required. But Curle's major distinction—of the Antonine and Flavian strata—enabled him to furnish Scottish archæology for the first time with a great range of relics easily divisible between the two epochs, and so to lay the foundations for a typology of Roman objects found in Scotland. In this respect he was a pioneer. The distinction had, indeed, been made earlier on other sites, but never upon such a scale nor with such surety and finality. The study of Samian ware and of certain types of coarse ware was firmly based for the first time in the history of a Romano-British site. Anyone who reads the sections of his volume which describe the structures and the pottery, and then compares them with previous work, will see how James Curle's accurate and unflagging sobriety of description marked a new epoch in the study of the subject. His discussion was marked and illumined throughout with an astonishing grasp of the comparative material, and, be it added, by a broad and leisurely humanity wholly lacking in the Continental works upon which it drew but did not depend.

A report which contained so much as we have already estimated in cool judgment would have been in itself a notable achievement. But much more than this remained. In association with the fort there were some remarkable groups of rubbish pits, whose contents, for variety and social interest, form a collection quite unequalled upon any other Roman site in

these islands and only perhaps matched at Doura on the Euphrates outside them. Few weapons, armour or everyday items of equipment of the Roman legionary or of the Roman auxiliary soldier are not to be found in the rich and unexampled group of relics from these pits. In addition, there are quite exceptionally perfect parade helmets and other cavalry troopers' equipment, a wealth of tools and accessories and a mass of small objects, unsurpassed in social significance. Most excavators would have quailed at the task of describing them; so much knowledge in so many fields was required. But the dauntless character of James Curle's genius has already emerged. With industry and perseverance, guided by his high and steady gifts of imagination, the heavy task of collecting and classifying the comparative material was undertaken. Technical and linguistic ability and journeys to the Continent were involved, but all were taken in the author's stride. At a period when British archæology seemed notable for its insularity, the patient energy of the Border lands, allied to the old humanity of Scottish education, produced a remarkable study, first delivered to the Scottish learned world in the form of Rhind Lectures, and then, with wisdom and foresight, published by this Society as a special volume. The Society was singularly fortunate in its choice of publishers, the well-known firm of MacLehose, who produced a book that took the archæological world by surprise. Few had imagined that the remote *castellum* by the Tweed could provide the material for an entirely new and brilliantly illustrated chapter in Roman military history: nor had anyone expected that this material would be accompanied by detailed evidence of the life and social organisation of the fort. The title of the great new book, *A Roman Frontier Post and its People*, showed that this was the vision which had irradiated the composition of the work, with all its meticulous attention to detail. The work was accorded due recognition in Scotland, the University of Aberdeen conferring a doctorate of laws upon its author. Half the labour in more conventional study would have won him distinction in a wider world, but to James Curle the modest satisfaction of having added to knowledge was its own reward. Where special knowledge was required, he knew where to get it. The numismatic section of the book was in the hands of Sir George Macdonald, the human remains were studied by T. H. Bryce, and the animal or vegetable remains by experts in those particular fields. No report ever gave a better example of the conviction of the unity of knowledge which was the guiding light of the Curle-Macdonald combination.

It was not unnatural that the discovery of so many notable relics in metal, wood, and other perishable materials, the more liable to decay after their long sojourn below ground, should have raised acutely the question of their preservation. This was a field in which many Museum authorities in Britain had at that time much to learn; and James Curle's wide

acquaintance with Continental museums, in particular with that of Namur, had long made him aware of the fact that a technique of preservation was there available, especially for iron objects, which far outstripped in efficiency the methods employed in most British museums. It was due to his pertinacious advocacy that the Board of Trustees for the National Galleries of Scotland, of which he had become a Curator in 1908, made a grant for apparatus; while this Society furnished the late Director of the Museum, at that time the Assistant Keeper, among whose qualifications was numbered a professional knowledge of chemistry, a Gunning Fellowship for the purpose of studying the methods of preservation in vogue at the most advanced Continental museums. The National Museum of Antiquities was thus equipped with a Keeper whose technical abilities were second to none, and who was able successfully to protect from decay not only the objects from Newstead but many other valued treasures in the national collection whose very existence depended upon skilled treatment. But, without detracting from the powers and ability of Mr Edwards, it is right to say that the plan which made this very valuable development possible was matured in the brain of James Curle, for which the Society, not to say the nation itself, owes him a debt of gratitude.

It has already been explained that James Curle was a busy professional man, whose daily work and administrative labours made him widely known and respected throughout the Borders. This explains why the bulk of his archæological labours remained concentrated in his local area, but it hides the fact that from 1925, when he became a Royal Commissioner for Historical Monuments, until his death, he gave valued and continual service to that body. There was, too, another general survey of exceptional value which he accomplished over many years of patient study. His work at Newstead made him peculiarly aware of the interplay of native and Roman cultures, and his thorough knowledge of the National Collections and the antiquarian literature of Scotland had taught him that this interaction affected every corner of the kingdom. It was not until 1932, however, that his reasoned study of the question appeared, in the form of one of the most learned papers that the Society has ever produced. This paper detailed ninety-nine finds of Roman objects, or groups of objects, from Scotland, discovered apart from Roman sites and therefore providing evidence of native trade with the Roman world. It was his last paper to the Society and a noble swan-song, always excepting, fitly enough, his *Memoir* of Sir George Macdonald. But many of his activities had remained unpublished, and some attracted little attention, like his fine study of the bronze leg from Milsington in the *Transactions* of the Berwickshire Natural History Club. He had a very remarkable collection of lantern slides, gathered together on the basis of his wide knowledge of Continental material, and it was his delight to exhibit a selection of these to the most varied

audiences. Soldiers of the Army of Occupation in Germany after the last war will remember his lectures well, as do many societies of all kinds throughout the length and breadth of the homeland. These discourses were marked by an unhesitating grasp of the subject, a clear delivery and an enthusiasm which communicated itself to his listeners.

The observation just made gives a hint of how lightly Dr Curle carried his mantle of learning. He was of a cheerful disposition, never more so than when visiting an excavation or discussing a new discovery: and the cheerfulness did not fade when the burden of years, deafness, and loneliness had hit him hard. He was most generous to younger men, kindly in advice and untiring in help, and he enjoyed nothing more than to discuss, by letter or word of mouth, an intricate problem, ever contriving to disguise the superior position to which his status and learning entitled him. The present writer owes him a wealth of gratitude in that respect, and in respect of generous gifts of offprints and slides. One more touch is worth record, for it somehow rounds off the man. Outside his own country, the Scot is not renowned for humour and merriment, though those who really know him know much otherwise. James Curle's humour had a whimsical form of its own. He was particularly well versed in the traditional ballads of the Border, whose vivid and rugged rhyme so long kept alive the virile Middle English tradition. It was his special delight to celebrate various Scottish excavations and their outstanding events in verses of the same style, circulated or recited amid a strictly limited group of friends, in the rich dialect of which he was an accomplished exponent. The writer can still recall the dry chuckle with which Sir George Macdonald used to savour the livelier passages.

But these sallies were confined to a select circle, outside which a modest gravity supervened. It may indeed be said that James Curle reflected his age, when to a local culture, deeply rooted in the humanities yet closely in touch with the romantic movement, there were added the liberal outlook of the industrial age and the advantages of easy cosmopolitan intercourse. The result was solid achievement, never divorced from the realities of life, sobered in the school of service and illumined by a spark of the divine. When the distinguished local company which attended James Curle to his grave laid him to rest, they sang the glorious things of Zion and the surety of redemption, reflecting quite another side of the man whom they were gathered to honour, but one which was the foundation of his life and character.

IAN A. RICHMOND.

## ARTHUR J. H. EDWARDS,

*Director of the Museum, 1938-1944.*

Arthur J. H. Edwards joined the staff of the Society's Museum as Assistant Keeper in 1912, just before Alexander O. Curle succeeded Joseph Anderson as Director. The appointment proved a fortunate one for Scottish archaeology. Educated at Robert Gordon's College, Aberdeen, the new Keeper had received practical training as a member of the technical staff of the Physiology Department of the University of Edinburgh and, since 1906, as a preparer in the Royal Scottish Museum. At the time of his appointment our Museum was faced with new tasks, or rather, through the foresight and energy of James Curle and his brother, had been awakened to a fuller realisation of its function. It fell to Edwards to organise the laboratory, the minimum equipment for which the Curles' persistence and enthusiasm had extorted from the Treasury, and to preserve for all time the superb collection of perishable iron and leather relics yielded by the excavation of Newstead. To fit himself the better for the task, the new Assistant Keeper went to Germany to study the latest scientific methods for the preservation of these difficult materials. As a result of his studies he was able to initiate a new era in the conservation of the relics of Scotland's past, and the splendid iron work from Newstead, Traprain Law, and Viking graves, that I have just been re-arranging, constitutes enduring monuments to his skill. Indeed, Mr Edwards became an acknowledged expert in the preservation of antiquities, his services and advice being at the service of all.

During the last world war the Assistant Keeper served in the Mediterranean theatre, and made full use of this opportunity for studying the antiquities and monuments of Malta, Egypt, and Palestine, till he could resume his duties in Edinburgh now under the Directorship of J. Graham Callander.

An ever-increasing flood of relics from systematic excavations began to pour into the Museum. The Director and Assistant Keeper, with the aid of a single preparer, were faced with an unending struggle to preserve, house, and, as far as possible, display these important documents in an unsuitable and antiquated building without adequate space, equipment or staff. Nevertheless Edwards found time outside the Museum to carry on productive field work.

In 1922 he was awarded the Gunning Fellowship in order to conduct excavations in Galloway, and in this and succeeding years made valuable contributions from the field, especially to the knowledge of chambered cairns (Drannadow, 1922; Lower Dounreay, 1928) and Viking sites (Ackergill, Reay, Ballinaby). The series of excavation reports from his

pen that appeared in our *Proceedings* are marked by a mastery of comparative material, as well as clarity and accuracy. At the same time his keen eye for surface remains and monumental details secured recognition for many unnoticed documents of archæological history, notably the Pegasus carved on the lintel of an Earth-house at Crichton that had been for fifty years a place of pilgrimage for archæologists who had never noticed the Roman carving.

In other years the Gunning Fellowship was profitably used for travel in Scandinavia, Denmark, Germany, France, and Ireland, to study Museums and their contents. As a consequence Edwards was well equipped museographically to succeed Dr Callander as Director, which he did in March 1938. But in September of the following year the Museum was closed by order of higher powers before its new head with the assistance of a still newer and inexperienced Keeper had had any opportunity to attempt the re-arrangement that he and every intelligent visitor to the institution recognized to be essential, but which he knew all too well could never be really satisfactory with the existing physical framework. Moreover, by this time his health was breaking down, and after several premonitory attacks heart-failure caused his death suddenly in the afternoon as he was returning from the Museum.

The late Director's service to Scottish archæology is therefore not to be measured by his published works and still less by the achievements of the short term of his Directorship. Prolonged familiarity with the Museum's priceless collections during his long connection with the institution had given him an unique mastery of Scottish antiquities, and he generously made the treasures of his knowledge available to local and foreign students whose works on Scottish subjects owe more to his counsels than is always acknowledged. Continental travel and regular digestion of foreign periodicals had given him a wider knowledge of comparative material than was possessed by many of his Scottish colleagues since the spacious days of Abercromby and Munro. His careful study of museum arrangements on the Continent as well as in this country had inspired him with ideas for the display of the concrete remains of Scottish history that an unsuitable building and the outbreak of war eighteen months after his appointment prevented him from realising. But such arrangement as had been achieved in that gloomy and overcrowded edifice was in no small measure due to his unremitting exertions while he was Assistant Keeper.

V. GORDON CHILDE.