

Obituary

Sylvia Benton

Miss Sylvia Benton, MA, BLitt, FSA, FSA Scot, died on 12 September 1985 in Raigmore Hospital, Inverness, at the age of 98. She has been a Fellow since 1928.

Miss Benton was born at Lahore, India, on 18 August 1887. Her father was a judge of the Chief Court of India, the family originally coming from Speyside. She was an early scholar at Girton College, Cambridge, and after residence at both Cambridge and Oxford she taught classics before taking up the study of archaeology at the age of 30, following the death of her father in 1917. Her wish to become one of the first women archaeologists was not without opposition in the profession, but she received strong encouragement from the young Gordon Childe whom she met in Greece in the late 1920s.

In pursuit of her special interest in Homer she excavated extensively on the Ionian island of Ithaca, the home of Odysseus, and was attached to the British School at Athens. She was an accomplished traveller, visiting many remote areas of Greece and excavating several difficult sites. She maintained a steady output of publications, most notably on Geometric tripods: her work in Greece is dealt with more fully in Professor JM Cook's excellent obituary in *Ann Brit School Athens* (forthcoming).

Miss Benton's principal contribution to Scottish archaeology was made between 1928 and 1930 when she conducted a thorough excavation of the occupation deposits in the Sculptor's Cave, Covesea, in Moray. She found evidence of human occupation from the Bronze Age, the Roman period and Pictish times which she published in a now-classic paper in our *Proceedings* (65 (1930–1), 177–216). At a time when much of Scottish archaeology was inward-looking, her firm grasp of the importance of the continental, late Urnfield, links of the bronze armlets which she had found was remarkable and was recognised some 30 years later by the designation of the most important horizon of the Scottish late Bronze Age as the 'Covesea Phase'. With characteristic foresight Miss Benton left a proportion of the floor deposits undisturbed for posterity. It is therefore pleasing to recall that 50 years after her own work and at the age of 92 she was able to clamber down the 90 ft high scaffolding on the cliff face to examine the excavations then in progress under the direction of Ian and Alexandra Shepherd.

In retirement (from 1970), Miss Benton lived at Prospect Terrace, Lossiemouth, where she continued to take a keen interest in archaeology and gave encouragement to all visiting archaeologists, both professional and amateur. For a short period she was the Honorary Curator of the Elgin Museum and was for many years a member of the Council of the Moray Society which runs the Museum. She was subsequently elected to one of the few Honorary Memberships of that Society and always took a keen interest in its activities.

Miss Benton was an excellent sportswoman and remained an active swimmer into her eighties. In common with many archaeologists she maintained a sharp interest in both cricket

and crime, the former through personal spectating, the latter through the reading of the stacks of detective fiction which always jostled the *Annual of the British School at Athens* on her coffee table.

Sylvia Benton was a lady of courage, spirit and enthusiasm. Above all, she was interested not only in things, but in people. She was an inspiration to all who knew her.

JIH Keillar, E Rhynas, IAG Shepherd