

Obituary

Stuart Maxwell, MA, FSA Scot

1922–2012

Stuart Maxwell was born in Edinburgh in 1922 and attended George Heriot's School; he remained a proud Herioter throughout his life. Like so many, his formal education was interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War, when he served on minesweepers protecting the Atlantic Convoys. At the end of hostilities, he returned to complete his MA in history at Edinburgh University. In 1947, he joined the Museum of Antiquities as an Assistant Keeper, under the inspirational Keepership of Robert Stevenson. Stevenson had only been appointed Keeper himself in 1946, and the pair found themselves in a prolonged struggle to have the 'small, grossly underfunded museum' taken seriously by government. The upshot was the appointment of the Phillip Committee and the eventual establishment, in 1954, of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland under its own Board of Trustees. Maxwell went on to become Deputy to the Keeper in 1971.

Working with colleagues of the calibre of Stevenson, Audrey Henshall and Sandy Fenton, Stuart Maxwell was part of the team that sought to develop and extend the Museum's collection to make it truly national in scope. Stuart's range of interests was expansive. He had a hand in developing – and indeed creating – many of the historic collections that are so fundamental to what NMS is today. He was particularly determined to ensure that the expansion of these collections had a sound basis in documentary evidence. His tireless archival research,

often in collaboration with his wife Ailsa (whose earlier wartime career at Bletchley Park no doubt helped in deciphering Stuart's occasionally impenetrable handwriting!), still provides the basis for much of the Museum's documentation of its collections. Stuart's list of publications serves to remind us of just how wide-reaching was his interest in Scottish material culture. From Scottish costume (on which he and Robin Hutchison published the first major survey in 1958, one of many productive collaborations with the Scottish National Portrait Gallery), through arms and armour, woodwork and furniture to Scottish silver: the index to the *Proceedings* alone gives ample evidence of his enquiring mind and fierce intellect.

His work on Scottish silver, which resulted in his seminal Rhind Lectures in 1975, undoubtedly provided the basis for not only NMS's incomparable collection, but also for that of many a Scottish local museum. Stuart was dedicated to fostering the development of good practices and collaboration between local and national museums, his work on the Scottish Museums Federation being a formal example of this. Perhaps more important, was his vast range of warm personal relationships with curators all over Scotland and beyond. There can hardly be a Scottish museum curator of a certain age that did not benefit from his sage advice. He travelled extensively throughout Scotland to research and advise in museums, churches and universities, with the occasional obscure

detour to find the very best sweet shop in the area!

Stuart Maxwell was both a Society and a social man. He was elected a Fellow of our Society in 1948 and throughout his life remained an active and energetic FSAScot. He was awarded Gunning fellowships on numerous occasions from the late 1940s to the early 1960s. He served as councillor in 1965, becoming Vice-President in 1967 and again in 1975, the year he delivered his Rhind Lectures. He instigated the bi-centenary exhibition within the Museum in 1980 to celebrate the Society's founding, and the next year became President. Stuart's tenure of office coincided with the often tortuous negotiations that led eventually to the passing of the National Heritage (Scotland) Bill and the amalgamation of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland and the Royal Scottish Museum in 1985. It would be safe to say Stuart did not agree with this proposed solution to the on-going quest to improve the provision made for the National Museum and he argued cogently against it, initially from his position as Deputy Keeper of the Museum and then as an ex-officio Trustee of the NMAS.

Stuart was also a highly social, family man, who loved nothing better than a good meal and lively discussion, the topics preferably including golf and rugby, particularly if the latter included the latest triumph for his beloved Heriots FPRFC. He was characterised by a generosity of spirit and a deep humanity; despite a busy schedule would always take time to explain and pass on knowledge. Any indication of an interest in a particular subject would regularly be met with the passing on of a book, pamphlet or binder of notes that one 'might find useful'. He had an abiding belief in the concept of public service and sought to instil that into all his staff; the museum

was there for *all* the people of Scotland and further afield. Woe betide any junior curator who suggested that they might be too busy to go down to the gallery floor to deal with an unscheduled enquiry by a visiting member of the public! Stuart sat on and advised many learned bodies, serving, for example, as councillor and president of the Scottish History Society and the Old Edinburgh Club, providing good counsel and knowledgeable support to all. He was able to devote more of his energies to such groups (and of course to golf) after he retired from the Museum on 1 May 1982, having given 34 years of service to an institution he loved. Perhaps his most favoured and enjoyable representative position was as a Freeman and later Warden of the Incorporation of Goldsmiths of the City of Edinburgh. He helped guide this venerable body through its transition into a modern, vibrant organisation and latterly, after he stood down from it, took enormous pleasure for its continued success in running what became, for a time, the busiest assay office in the UK. The Incorporation united two of Stuart's great interests – his native city and the history of Scottish goldsmiths, and it is perhaps to the latter that we should look for a fitting epitaph. In 1954, Stuart Maxwell was responsible for the acquisition of one of the Museum's most beautiful and interesting examples of the goldsmith's craft – the Galloway Mazer. Made by James Gray in the Canongate in 1569, it bears the following inscription from Proverbs:

Ane good man is to be chosen above great riches
and loving favour is above silver and most fine
gold.

Stuart Maxwell was beyond doubt 'ane good man'.

GEORGE DALGLEISH, MA, FSAScot